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ABSTRACT

This book focuses on the plight of the academic middle of graduating high school students. These students have been led to believe that the only way to succeed is to attend a four-year college, even though they are unprepared for college work. As a result, half of the students who begin college fail to graduate, and even those who do graduate often fail to find college-level jobs after they finish college. The book describes factors in this situation, including the following: intense pressure from parents, schools, colleges, and society for students to attend four-year colleges; college prep curricula that leave half of their graduates unprepared for college work; open admissions policies in colleges; and lack of knowledge of appealing alternatives to four-year degrees on the part of parents, students, and schools. It demonstrates that technical, craft, and repair occupations that require less than a bachelor's degree will pay better than any occupations except the professions in the years ahead and will provide more job openings than occupations requiring college degrees. The book recommends the following steps to making preparation for such occupations more acceptable: (1) providing systematic career guidance for students and structured feedback for parents; (2) redesigning college prep for all students; (3) ensuring equal status and focused academics; and (4) bringing "average students" to excellence. The book contains 75 references. (KC)

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Other Ways to Win

Creating Alternatives for High School Graduates

Kenneth C. Gray
Edwin L. Herr

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Preface

Having worked earlier in our careers as both high school teachers and counselors, we enjoy being in high schools, particularly at the beginning or end of any high school day, as students file in and out of the building. It is always fascinating to see the diversity, fashions, and interpersonal dramas that are played out. It always leaves us with a feeling of wellness, that the future is in good hands. Well, at least it used to.

During the last 10 years, we have found ourselves worrying more and more about high school-aged adolescents as they approach graduation. Not all of them, of course; in particular, not the top 25% or 30%, the academically blessed, who seem to have everything going for them. We are concerned about the fate of the rest, particularly those from the academic middle. We worry because these adolescents face a difficult and uncertain labor market. We worry because they have been told there is only *one way to win*—namely, to prepare for the professional ranks by going to a 4-year college. Unfortunately, although this career advice is realistic for some high school students, it is clearly unrealistic for many of them. Particularly for many of those from the academic middle, this advice is totally out of sync both with their high school academic records and with the labor market they will face if they actually graduate with a 4-year college degree. Tragically, for these students, the only certainty is that the majority will accumulate significant student loan debt in the process.

Thus, we wrote this book for those in the academic middle of our high school classes, their parents, and their teachers—to alert them

to an important fact: There are *other ways to win* in today's labor market. Our intent is not necessarily to dissuade students from attempting a 4-year college program; rather, it is to point out alternatives that carry, for many, a higher probability of success, as well as lower tuition costs. We argue that the key to future economic security is not education per se, but rather obtaining the occupational skills that lead to high skills/high wage work. Whereas some of these skills are typically learned in 4-year colleges or graduate schools, others can be learned at 1- or 2-year postsecondary technical institutions, and still others can be learned in work-based programs sponsored by employers and employee groups.

This book is divided into three parts. In Part I, the *one way to win* belief is explored in detail. In Part II, the secondary and postsecondary experiences of those in the academic middle are analyzed in order to document the frequent failure of those who attempt a 4-year college degree program to either complete a degree or attain a professional job. In Part III, we outline three major steps and various strategies that high school educators can take to modify the high school program in order to create *other ways to win* for those in the academic middle. We hope, ultimately, to create advocates for the academically average and to bring them into the mainstream of educational reform debates.

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In memory of Jennifer Carter Gray

About the Authors

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Bureau of Pupil Personnel Services, Pennsylvania Department of Education (1966-68). The author or coauthor of more than 250 articles and 28 books and monographs, he is Past President of the American Association for Counseling and Development, Past President of the National Vocational Guidance Association, and Past President of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. He has been elected a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, the American Pyschological Society, and the American Association for Applied and Preventive Psychology for his "unique and sustained contributions to psychology." Among his many awards, he has received the Eminent Career Award of the National Career Development Association.

PART I

The *One Way to Win* Mentality

1

Rescuing a Generation Adrift

How beautiful is youth, how bright it gleams
With its illusions, aspirations, and dreams.
Longfellow, "Morituri Salutamus"
(1807-1887)

Each year, U.S. high schools graduate roughly 2.5 million students, almost 75% of all youth aged 17. Think back to the last high school graduation you remember—the long line of graduates in caps and gowns, some jubilant, some crying, most just silent and pensive. Among them were the students who were academically special, the ones everyone knew, the so-called future leaders: the class valedictorian, the national honor society members, the honor roll students. This book is not about most of them. It is about many of the rest—the "forgotten" or "academic" middle. These academically average students are the adolescents who, seeing no other alternatives, typically head off to a 4- or 2-year transfer college despite being academically and/or emotionally ill prepared for the experience. The tragedy is that many are not successful and as a result drop out. Even among those who graduate, as many as one half may never find college-level work.

Both the academically blessed and the academic middle, however, have one thing in common: They will spend a lot of money, and most will end up with significant student loan debt. This situation makes little sense, and the costs of this folly are getting out of hand. These youth are adrift in an uncertain world. They see only *one way to win* the race for the American dream. The likelihood that they will win is slim, yet they see little choice because the United States has failed to provide them with legitimate alternatives. This situation requires correction. This book's focus is on the creation of these alternatives by reengineering the high school program of study.

The word *adrift* connotes visions of floundering, uncertainty, lack of control, and ultimate peril. It accurately describes a large percentage of today's high school students—students whose aspirations and postsecondary plans are inconsistent with both their high school academic record and labor market projections. These youth exhibit all the classic signs of career immaturity: Their plans are inconsistent with reality; they are floundering; and ultimately many are disappointed or even scarred by their experiences. Who are these students? Typically, they are thought to be mostly the non-college-bound. Not so. The majority of even academically average high school students now go to college. In fact, the most visible sign of mass confusion among the nation's youth is the growing percentage of high school graduates who enroll in 4-year colleges or 2-year programs that transfer to a 4-year degree program. Why do they go? Because they have been taught that there is now only *one way to win*.

SECTION I

The *One Way to Win* Paradigm Explained

How prevalent is the "go to college" mentality? The popular press gives the impression that about half go on to higher education while the rest—the so-called forgotten middle—go to work or into the military. The fact is that the majority of high school graduates now go to college, very few go immediately to work, and even fewer enter the military or become homemakers. Survey research of graduating high school seniors conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) illustrates the persuasiveness of the go-to-college or *one way to win* mentality.

TABLE 1.1 Percentage of High School Seniors in 1972 and 1992 Who Expected to Attend Various Types of Postsecondary Institutions, by Gender

Highest Level Expected	*All Seniors*		*Males*		*Females*	
	1972	*1992*	*1972*	*1992*	*1972*	*1992*
None	18.0	5.3	15.5	6.7	22.2	3.9
2-Year Technical Community College	18.0	10.8	17.4	11.8	18.6	9.9
College	50.4	50.6	50.8	50.4	50.1	50.8
Graduate/ Professional	12.6	33.3	16.3	31.1	9.1	35.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCES: Compiled from *National Longitudinal Study, 1972 (base year)*, by National Center for Education Statistics, 1972, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; and *National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, 1992 Second Follow-Up*, by National Center for Education Statistics, 1992, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

The Preference to Attend a Four-Year College

As a part of a larger longitudinal study of public school students contracted by the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 1988; referred to hereafter as NELS 88), a national sample of 1992 high school graduates was surveyed about their postsecondary plans (see Table 1.1): Almost 95% said they planned to continue their education beyond high school; 75% said they planned to do so immediately after graduation. According to national census data, approximately 70% actually carried through on these plans (Office of Education Research and Improvement [OERI], 1994). Even more amazing, nearly 84% indicated planning to obtain at least a 4-year college degree.

Compare these aspirations with those of students who graduated 20 years earlier. In 1972, 81% planned to continue their education, 63% planned to get a 4-year degree, but only about 46% actually entered higher education immediately after graduation. Of special note, the percentages of students who planned to pursue a 2-year

TABLE 1.2 College Freshmen: Reasons Noted as Very Important in Deciding to Go to College

	Total	*Men*	*Women*
To get a better job	82%	82%	82%
To make more money	75%	78%	73%
To learn about things that interest me	75%	71%	79%
To prepare for graduate school	61%	56%	66%
Parents wanted me to go	35%	34%	36%
To improve reading and study skills	43%	38%	46%

SOURCE: Compiled from *American Freshman National Norms for Fall 1993* by the American Council on Education, 1994a, Washington, DC: Author.

technical degree actually decreased in the two decades following 1972. Although today about one third of those going on to higher education from high school go to 2-year institutions, the majority take general education studies programs designed for transfer to a 4-year college. On a percentage basis, very few high school graduates enroll in 2-year technical or other postsecondary occupational programs. This information is important. Authors of articles in *Fortune* magazine and other business publications argue that, in the changing workforce, "technicians" will be the new worker elite. A large number, perhaps the majority, of technicians are persons who have completed 2-year associate degree technical programs in technical and community colleges. Thus, 2-year technical education has the best potential for a positive return and is critical for the future economic competitiveness of the United States. The percentage of students interested in or familiar with this option, however, is declining.

The Motives of College Freshmen

Why do so many want to go to college? Is it a sudden thirst for learning, or something more mundane, like jobs, security, and money?

TABLE 1.3 Percentage of High School Seniors in 1972 and 1992 Who Believed Each Value to Be "Very Important," by Gender

	All Seniors		*Males*		*Females*	
Values	*1972*	*1992*	*1972*	*1992*	*1972*	*1992*
Being successful in work	84.5	89.3	86.2	89.0	82.8	89.6
Being able to find steady work	77.8	87.9	82.1	87.1	73.5	88.6
Having strong friendships	79.2	79.9	80.4	79.8	78.0	80.1
Marrying and having a happy family	81.7	79.0	78.5	75.7	84.9	82.3
Having lots of money	17.8	37.4	25.9	45.3	9.8	29.4
Working to correct social and economic inequalities	26.9	20.3	22.4	17.0	31.3	23.6

SOURCES: Compiled from *National Longitudinal Study, 1972 (base year)*, by the National Center for Educational Statistics, 1972, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; and *National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, 1992 Second Follow-Up*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 1992, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Each year, the American Council on Education (1994a) sponsors a survey of more than 200,000 freshmen and asks that question. The principal reason for enrolling reported by these college freshmen was "to get a better job." "To make more money" tied for second (see Table 1.2).

These responses are consistent with those from the NCES study of 1992 graduates. When asked to list the qualities most important to their future, 89.3% said "being successful in work." A close second (87.9%) was "being able to find steady work." Equally interesting are their other values—namely, "having strong friendships" and "marrying and having a happy family." "Working to correct social and economic inequalities" was relatively unimportant (see Table 1.3).

These survey responses help clarify the *one way to win* paradigm or mentality. Uncertain about the future, today's youth have become

decidedly conservative. Reminiscent of a different era, these youth seek economic security, friends, and family. According to conventional wisdom, the way to acquire these valued goals is to "go to college"; better yet, it's to go to a 4-year college. These students make these plans in the hope they will lead to a "better job" that will ensure future economic security. We have reached the last element of the *one way to win* paradigm—namely, the conventional wisdom about the "location" of good jobs.

The Career Choices of College Freshmen

In the light of evidence that most students go to college to get a better job, the validity of the *one way to win* mentality as a paradigm would seem to depend on the existence of ample number of jobs that pay high wages and require a college degree. We put that issue aside for now; understanding the *one way to win* mentality requires insight into where students think the good jobs of the future will be. To find out, we again turn to the NCES 1992 follow-up study.

Table 1.4 lists 14 occupational groups and the percentages of 1992 graduates who aspired to careers in these broad occupational fields. The results suggest that the career plans of U.S. youth are not well thought out: 49.3% of male and 68.8% of female graduating high school seniors expected to be employed in professional fields (e.g., accountants, educators, physicians, lawyers, engineers). When the data were sorted to examine those who planned to continue their education, the extremes were even more dramatic.

Being a professional was the top-ranked preference; no other career choice was even close. For example, only somewhat fewer than 7% indicated a preference for owning their own business (6.7%) or being a manager (6.0%). More important to the nation's economic health, only 8.4% of males and 3.7% of females expected to work as technicians; even fewer expected to work in the skilled crafts. If technicians prepared with strong technical skills will be the new worker elite and will, as predicted by labor market data, be very well paid for their skills, then an important inconsistency seems to exist because very few of today's youth aspire to these occupations. They all want a 4-year degree that they hope will lead to a job in the professional ranks.

TABLE 1.4 Percentage of High School Seniors in 1972 and 1992 Who Expected to Be Employed in Various Occupations, by Gender

	All Seniors		*Males*		*Females*	
Occupation	*1972*	*1992*	*1972*	*1992*	*1972*	*1992*
Clerical	14.2	3.5	1.9	1.2	25.5	5.7
Craftperson/Trade	7.5	2.8	15.1	5.3	0.5	0.3
Farming	1.6	1.0	2.7	1.6	0.6	0.4
Homemaker	3.1	1.2	0.0	0.1	5.9	2.2
Laborer	2.5	0.8	4.9	1.4	0.3	0.1
Manager	3.1	6.0	5.1	6.6	1.3	5.4
Military	2.4	3.2	4.1	5.6	0.8	0.8
Operative	2.3	1.2	3.9	2.1	0.8	0.2
Professional	45.4	59.0	41.8	49.3	48.8	68.8
Proprietor	1.8	6.7	3.2	8.7	0.5	4.8
Protective services	2.2	4.1	4.2	6.9	0.4	1.4
Sales	3.0	1.9	2.7	2.3	3.3	1.5
Service	4.2	2.6	1.6	0.6	6.7	4.6
Technical	6.6	6.0	8.8	8.4	4.6	3.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCES: Compiled from *National Longitudinal Study, 1972 (base year)*, by the National Center for Educational Statistics, 1972, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; and *National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, 1992 Second Follow-Up*, by the National Center for Educational Statistics, 1992, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

The Result: College Mania

With this final piece of information about high school graduates' career plans, the "operational definition" of the *one way to win* paradigm is complete. *The one way to win paradigm is the belief that the only hope for future economic security for today's youth is at least a 4-year college degree obtained with the expectation that it will lead to a good-paying job in the professions.* The extent to which all high school graduates appear to be internalizing the *one way to win* paradigm and basing their future plans on it, regardless of their abilities, academic preparation,

or labor market realities, is truly astonishing; it has reached manic proportions.

In the immediate post-World War II era, about 50% of graduating high school seniors went on to higher education, with males slightly outnumbering females. Of this group, two thirds went to 4-year colleges and one third went to 2-year higher education institutions. The other 50% went to work, enlisted in the military, or became full-time homemakers. A reading of the popular press and of concerns expressed in national reports about the "forgotten half" (W. T. Grant Foundation, 1988) might lead to the assumption that the situation is about the same in the 1990s. In fact, it has changed dramatically.

In every year since 1980, the percentage of all high school graduates attending higher education has increased. In 1993, a record 68% went on to higher education; most went to 4-year colleges. In 1993, of those enrolling in institutions of higher education directly after high school, 64% (OERI, 1994) were enrolled in 4-year colleges. Importantly, the majority of those enrolling in 2-year institutions are not preparing for careers by taking technical programs, but instead are enrolling in general education studies programs that promise transfer to a 4-year degree program. For example, in Pennsylvania, among those in higher education in 1993, only 11% were in occupation-specific programs. Contrary to conventional wisdom, only 40% of those in community colleges were enrolled in career-specific programs of study (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 1994). Perhaps more dramatic is the low number of high school graduates who go directly to work; now, fewer than 20% of all high school graduates enter the labor force and fewer than 5% go into the military.

The transition from school to work may have been a priority in the early days of the Clinton administration, but clearly it is not a priority of most high school graduates: They want to go to college.

The dictionary defines *mania* as "excessive or unreasonable enthusiasm" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1993, p. 707). The current enthusiasm for a 4-year college degree is excessive and therefore "manic" in nature. It is excessive because this enthusiasm is expressed without regard for academic ability or maturity level. Particularly for those graduates from the academic middle, it is contrary to labor market projections. This mania also ignores the differences in the quality of 4-year colleges and the likely job outlook from different tiers of colleges. Finally, it totally ignores the costs—

costs that can no longer be ignored—that are both human and financial in nature and that are jeopardizing both the nation and its youth.

SECTION II

The Price of *One Way to Win*

The Dollars and Cents Costs of *One Way to Win*

The most obvious and perhaps the only publicized costs of the *one way to win* mentality and the related phenomenon of "college mania" are those that can be measured in dollars and cents. These costs arise from charges for tuition, room, board, books, transportation, junior year abroad, and so forth. They accrue to both students and parents and to the government. Their rate of increase is exceeding both the disposable income of individuals and the tax revenues of the government.

The dollar costs of 4-year higher education is the Achilles' heel of the *one way to win* mentality. Although ultimately the human cost of *one way to win* may do the most long-term harm, the dollar cost is the most likely to get people's attention and to make them receptive to alternatives. Thus, we first examine briefly the better-known dollar costs of the *one way to win* mentality.

The Costs to Students and Parents

The *one way to win* mentality might not be a concern if college were provided by government for free or if students and parents could easily afford it. But as millions of parents learn each year, college is not free, and fewer and fewer can afford it. In 1980, the average costs (tuition, room, and board) at 4-year colleges totaled $3,499; in 1992, the total was $15,128 (OERI, 1993). At most private colleges, it is more than $20,000 per year. Who can afford this expense? The answer is, fewer and fewer people. To paraphrase OERI (1994) research,

> While since the 1980-81 school year college costs have risen 55% at private colleges and 32% at public institutions, median family income (in families with children 6 to 17 years old) has not kept pace; it fell over the same period 2% for

> families in general and fell 8% for families at the 25th earnings percentile. (p. 32)

Higher education costs have risen so much that most students now need financial aid and must borrow money to attend. Between 1990 and 1995, the number of student loans from the federal Direct Loan Program doubled (Hartle, 1994). Although only about half of those who start a baccalaureate degree program ever graduate, the majority of graduates and dropouts alike have one thing in common: Both groups will accrue significant student loan debt. In Pennsylvania, the payment schedule in 1993 was for an average student loan debt of $11,000. Debts two or three times this figure are common. How do those who drop out handle this? They still receive a loan payment schedule even though they do not have a degree. Not surprising, failure to complete a degree is a powerful predictor of whether a student will default on student loans. Currently, the default rate on government-backed student loans is 13%—a hint that higher education is costing the government a lot both in direct and indirect subsidies to higher education.

The Costs to the Public

Although much has been written about the rising costs of higher education for students and parents, less is mentioned about the rising costs of higher education for federal and state governments. In total, the U.S. economy annually spends approximately $150 billion on higher education, about $15,000 for each attending student. Of these billions, federal and state governments pick up more than 50% of the bill at public institutions and 17% at private institutions (OERI, 1994).

A second expense to the public from higher education and one receiving increasing attention as efforts to balance the federal budget continue is student financial aid programs. Forty-eight percent of all college students at 2- and 4-year public institutions and 70% at private institutions receive financial aid. About $7.7 billion of this aid is federal money; $2.5 billion comes from state funds (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993, p. 178) in the form of outright grants to students. Thus, such funds are a direct unrecovered taxpayer expense. Still other funds—$24.3 billion in 1994 (Hartle, 1994)—are earmarked to guarantee student loans. This guarantee means that taxpayers pick

up the bill for defaults on student loan payments. Between 1985 and 1993, federal expenditures for higher education grew 39%. Since 1992, students have defaulted on $19.2 billion in federal student loans (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993, p. 178). The government can no longer afford this situation or, as some would argue, is no longer willing to raise taxes to pay for it.

The U.S. national debt is $4.4 trillion, which costs the federal government $296 billion in payments on interest and principal annually (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993, p. 325). Thus, with limited financial resources and many requests for funds from diverse special interests and groups, the federal government can no longer be counted on to pump additional funds into higher education. Already, there are signs that it will not. For example, Congress was not able to fund the current student aid bill at the necessary appropriation level, and the percentage of federal aid to total student aid has actually dropped (Blackburn & Sparks, 1993). Another example is the much-heralded 1993 National Youth Service Act, which linked public service to a grant for college. This act required $11.3 billion to implement its provisions over 3 years, but Congress could only raise $1.5 billion, enough to provide grants to 1% of the eligible. Another sign that the federal government cannot afford more increases in support for higher education is the 1993 Higher Education Act; this act stipulates that undergraduates at colleges with student loan default rates higher than 25% will not be eligible for federal student loans. But issues of dollars and cents mask what may be the most dangerous cost of the *one way to win* mentality: the human cost for those who lose.

The Human Cost of *One Way to Win*

A less publicized but more insidious and cruel human cost results from the *one way to win* mentality and college mania. To illustrate the human cost of providing only *one way to win*, we have created a little parable called the "high-jump culture."

The mythical high-jump culture was a very simple one that valued fairness above all else. To ensure fairness, its leader created a single standard that, if met, would ensure social status and financial security regardless of other variables related to birth. The only thing youth had to do was jump over a 6-foot fence. The leader believed

that establishing such a standard would eliminate all internal competition for wealth and status and that everyone would know what he or she had to do to have both; and because it was an objective standard, everyone would be happy. Thus, the leader was confused when, after a few years of enforcing this single standard, all but a few citizens were unhappy. Perplexed, he asked his advisers for an evaluation. This is what they told him.

The trouble stemmed from the fact that the single standard was not fair to all. First, jumping over a 6-foot hurdle was easy for some people because they were born with long or extra springy legs that made high jumping easy, not because these people worked harder than others. Thus, this group gained status and wealth, not because of merit, but because of the fortunes of birth. This had not been the leader's intention. Even among those who could leap 6 feet, however, many were unhappy. Why? Because the economy of the high-jump culture had not been very good: There were not enough high-paying jobs for all who could jump 6 feet; in short, the promise of economic security could not be kept.

According to the leader's advisers, however, the real concern was not the discontent of those who jumped 6 feet, but rather the unhappiness of those who were borderline 6-foot jumpers or who could not jump very high at all. The borderline jumpers believed or were led to believe that they could jump 6 feet if they took the right training program in high school, the so-called high-jump prep curriculum. Most borderline jumpers enrolled in this curriculum and even took the special high-jumping aptitude test designed to predict their ability to ever clear 6 feet. This tactic did not matter much, however, because regardless of their performance on this high-jumping test or in the high-jump prep curriculum, just about everyone was allowed to enroll in the post-high school high-jump contest anyway.

Unfortunately, attending these contests was very expensive. Wanting everything to be fair, the leaders arranged for loans for those unable to afford the program. Of the students in this group, some eventually jumped 6 feet, but fewer than half did so. Most of the borderline high jumpers gave up and drifted home, defeated and burdened with debt.

The advisers to the leader of the high-jump culture were wise men and women. Thus, they warned that the real tragedy affected those youth who determined early in life that they were never going

to jump 6 feet because they had short legs and lead feet. This group was the unhappiest of all. Many either dropped out of high school or came to school but did not pay much attention; after all, why should they—in a culture whose only valued accomplishment was jumping 6 feet? Clearly, they would not achieve this.

Having heard this report, the leader was deeply troubled; clearly, what he had viewed as fair—namely, this single standard—was not very fair at all. Most who tried to jump 6 feet failed and, in the process, lost both confidence and their money. The most harmful aspect was that some had no hope of ever jumping 6 feet and thus gave up early in life. This attitude caused the leader to ask the obvious question: "What should we do?" "Easy," said the advisers. "Create *other ways to win.*" Alternatives could include learning to build and maintain technology and mastering academic skills. These alternatives could lead to high status and, if the economy improved, to higher earnings. Thus, new options were added. The high-jump culture evolved into the "many ways to win" culture. Although not everyone won, this transformation made the process a fair one. Many more people tried, and more actually won. The culture changed from one in which most lost and became embittered, to one in which hope prevailed and sufficient options were available. Almost everyone had a legitimate hope of succeeding in at least one option and enjoying the rewards.

This parable of the high-jump culture illustrates the theme of this book: the need for and benefits of creating *other ways to win.* The parallels between the current U.S. culture and this hypothetical nation of high jumpers are obvious. At present in the United States, youth only have *one way to win.* In the parable, this was the ability to jump 6 feet; in our culture, it is getting a baccalaureate degree. Unfortunately, evidence presented in the next chapters shows that the baccalaureate degree route is not for everyone. We need to be as wise as the leader's advisers and realize that the *one way to win* mentality hurts many who have no hope of ever entering the game; these individuals deserve other options. But before moving on to further develop this topic, we should note one other cost or threat imposed by the *one way to win* mentality: the serious mismatch it causes between the types of skills that will be needed by the United States to be economically competitive and the aspirations of U.S. youth.

The Cost of Decreased Global Economic Competitiveness

If this were the 1960s or 1970s and if we were willing to disregard human costs, the *one way to win* mentality and college mania probably could and would be tolerated. Twenty years ago, secure in its global economic superiority and preoccupied with the cold war, the U.S. perhaps could afford the massive indecision of its youth. Some would argue that this is exactly what occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Financially, the nation was still rich, the balance of payments was positive, and the national debt was minimal by today's standards. The nation could afford to support a large percentage of youth in college; this was a relatively inexpensive task during the 1970s. Equally important, the country still enjoyed global economic superiority. As long as the elite were educated well, the fact that the rest were floundering was not a national concern. The nation still had the largest number of low-skill/high-wage manufacturing jobs in the world. These jobs were available for the nation's youth when they were ready to "settle down." This scenario is not true today.

During the 1980s, most Americans had to adjust their assumptions about the economic future of the nation. As factories closed and even profitable companies downsized, the relationship between domestic economic well-being and foreign economic competition became painfully clear. As President Bill Clinton took office, he warned, "The nation cannot close its borders"—it must compete. Accompanying this realization was the consensus that the most important variable in economic competitiveness was the skills of the nation's workforce.

The next question is this: Why does the United States have such a poorly prepared workforce? The nation's higher education system is generally regarded as the best in the world. Greater percentages of citizens enter the higher education system than in any other nation, greater numbers graduate, and these percentages are still rising. According to these facts, then, the United States should have the best-skilled workforce in the world. In fact, the *one way to win* paradigm and the college mania it fuels should help the nation prepare for global economic competition. Yet, a consultation of balance of trade figures confirms that this does not seem to be the case in global markets. The United States still buys much more from abroad than it sells, and the nation's wealth continues to flow into the pockets of

the workers in other nations. What, then, is the problem? The problem is that the *one way to win* mentality has blinded the nation to a dangerous mismatch between the types of workers demanded by global economies and the types of workers prepared by its schools and colleges.

The quest for strategic advantage in international trade is a goal shared by all nations that seek to maintain or improve their citizens' standard of living. How is strategic advantage achieved? In his book *Head to Head: The Coming Economic Battle Among Japan, Europe, and America* (1992), Lester Thurow argues that, among the three classical economic inputs—natural resources, technology and capital, and workers—workers are of paramount importance today. Japan has no natural resources but is doing quite well economically; the United States has ample natural resources but is not doing as well as it should be; and both have comparable production technology. So what accounts for the relatively poor global performance of the United States, particularly when it sends more people to college than any other nation in the world? According to Thurow, the answer is that our major competitors, the Japanese and the Germans in particular, may not send as many to college but do a much better job educating the "total workforce." As Thurow argues,

> If the route to success is inventing new products, the education of the smartest 25% of the labor force is critical. If the route to success is being the cheapest and best producer of products, new or old, the education of the bottom 50 percent of the population moves to center stage. This part of the population must staff those new processes. If the bottom 50% cannot learn what must be learned, new high-tech processes cannot be employed. (p. 52)

The critical point to be made here is that the 50% who Thurow argues are critical to future competitiveness are floundering. Lacking other alternatives, 95% of all youth, including a majority of the 50% discussed by Thurow, want a 4-year college education in the hope that it will lead to a career in the professions. They hold this ambition despite the fact that most lack the academic preparation to be successful in 4-year colleges; most are unlikely to graduate; and even those who do face limited opportunities in the labor market. Meanwhile, fewer than 4% aspire to careers in technologies, crafts, or

specialized repair fields, even though this type of work may comprise 20% of the total job market in the future, will pay wages second only to the professions, and is absolutely critical to global competitiveness.

Any nation would be concerned about this gross mismatch between the aspirations of its youth and the skills needed to be globally competitive. In the battle for global strategic economic advantage, wherein the stakes are jobs and the nation's standard of living, lack of action concerning this mismatch could be viewed as tantamount to aiding the enemy. This situation is not the fault of the youth; society taught them to believe in the *one way to win* paradigm, so they head off to college, prepared or not, with complete disregard for future labor market prospects and incurring considerable debt in the process. There has to be a better way. To bring this point home, we conclude this chapter with comments made by Keith, a high school student interviewed during research conducted for this book.

A Case Study

Keith and the College Game

Keith is 17. His high school academic record is mediocre at best; at the time of the interview, he was not certain he had enough credits to be technically called a senior. His principal ambition was to obtain his driver's license, which he did not have because he lacked the academic skills and ability to pass the "rules of the road" part of the driver's test. During the interview, he was asked about his postgraduation plans. The interviewer expected a reply about the need to find full-time employment; instead, Keith said, "I haven't decided yet what college to go to. I'll decide next year." The interviewer was speechless. Keith responded with a glare that said, "Did you believe me?"—a look familiar to those who work in high schools.

The gulf between Keith's abilities and his stated postgraduation plans leads one to conclude that this young man is seriously adrift; fantasy is an inadequate description of his plans. Then again, perhaps he wasn't fantasizing; perhaps he was just playing the game, saying what he thought the interviewer, like his peers and possibly his parents, wanted to hear. Perhaps he really knew that college was not a viable option for him. At any rate, not long thereafter, Keith left school and left home. He may have realized the folly of the idea of

going to college and decided to spare himself the embarrassment—a hint of the human cost of providing only *one way to win*. He and literally millions like him—most of whom are blessed with considerably more academic ability—see only *one way to win*. These teens call this situation "the college game." "College mania" seems more appropriate. There needs to be more than one game, as well as *other ways to win*.

Other Ways to Win

We argued in this chapter that many of today's graduating high school seniors, particularly those from the academic middle, are seriously adrift. They have been led to believe that a baccalaureate degree will lead to a career in the professions and is the only way to ensure future economic security and status. This mentality, in turn, has fueled college mania—the unfounded enthusiasm for a 4-year degree. Unfortunately, the *one way to win* paradigm is a myth, and college mania is not benign—it has significant costs to the United States and to its youth. Most devastating, it has caused many youth to give up hope. This mania is a cancer on the nation. Like any disease, its pathology must be understood before a cure can be developed. This analysis is the purpose of Chapter 2.

2

Recognizing the Forces Behind *One Way to Win*

It's gotten to the point where each person should be issued a college diploma [at birth] instead of a birth certificate.

A. Shanker (1994, p. 4)[1]

The vast majority of today's high school students who populate the academic middle are acting out career plans that are clearly unrealistic and that stem from the *one way to win* mentality. Having been taught that there is only one road to the American dream, the majority (94.7%) express the intent to continue their education; most (83.9%) want a degree from a 4-year college, and most (57% of men and 74% of women) say they will seek jobs in the professional ranks. For many, particularly those in the academic middle, these plans are clearly fantasy: Unless U.S. high schools suddenly become so instructionally effective that 84% graduate with the requisite skills to complete a baccalaureate degree and unless the structure of the future labor market changes dramatically to provide twice as much professional work, they have no realistic reason to expect to achieve these goals (see Tables 1.1 and 1.4).

Meanwhile, the costs of this fantasy for the United States, its youth, and their parents are increasing too much to ignore any longer. These costs are high both in terms of their negative impact on the

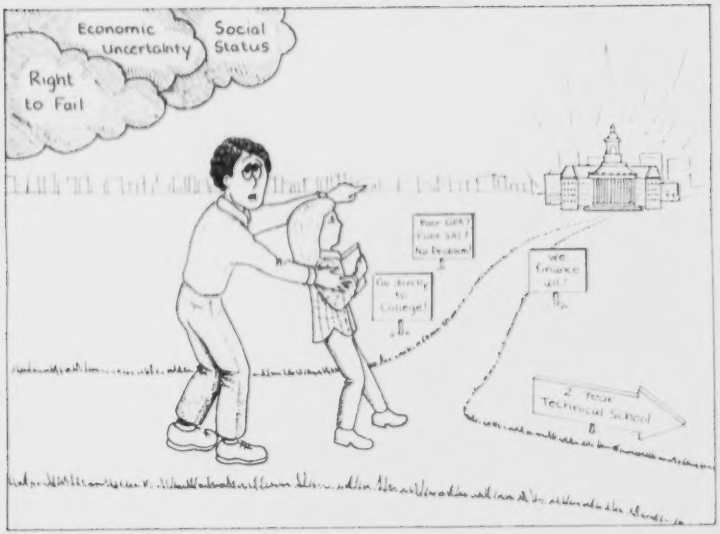

Figure 2.1. The "Push" to Go to College
NOTE: Illustration by Denise Dorricott.

nation's future competitiveness and on personal, federal, and state budgets, and in terms of the human cost of limited opportunities, unmet expectations, and resulting pessimism, cynicism, and low self-esteem. If the damage done by the *one way to win* mentality is to be undone and if its costs are to be brought under control, the factors that make this ideology so persuasive and pervasive must be understood. This is the purpose of this chapter.

A Model to Understanding the *One Way to Win* Mentality

Although the magnitude and effectiveness of the current pressure or "press" to go to college (see Figure 2.1) may be historic, the factors that influence youths' decisions to attend higher education have been of interest to researchers for some time. For example, Hossler and Stage (1992) developed a statistically valid model for the

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"predisposition" to go to college. This model explains the decision as a reaction to parental/peer pressure coupled with an individual's academic ability or high school record. Pressure from parents and peers, in turn, results from pressures applied from social messages and morals, as well as conventional economic wisdom. Using the Hossler and Stage model as a starting point, we offer an expanded model to explain the factors that make the *one way to win* philosophy so prevalent in the 1990s.

In our college choice model, the decision stems from ubiquitous pressure to go to college; this pressure comes from parents, friends, teachers, and the media. The consistent message from all of these groups is that there is only *one way to win:* Go to a 4-year college and pursue a career in the professions. If one believes, as we do, that persons promoting the *one way to win* mentality are well intentioned and sincerely believe in this advice, then one must assume that their beliefs are based on a rationale that comes from some rather convincing economic arguments and/or deep-seated ideologies and values. In our model, we suggest three such variables: economic uncertainty, social status, and the ideology of equity and the right to fail.

Conspicuously missing from the influences on the choice to go to college is academic ability. This was not an oversight. In these times of excess capacity in higher education and resultant open admissions at all but a small fraction of 4-year colleges, academic ability no longer seems to be a consideration in the decision to pursue a 4-year college degree. Although academic ability may well determine which 4-year college a student will attend, lack of academic ability no longer means not going. Thus, we view open admissions as one of the two great enablers of the *one way to win* paradigm. One reason for the persuasiveness of this paradigm is the strong possibility that the vast majority of graduating high school seniors will receive an opportunity to try 4-year college because getting into a 4-year college or a 2-year program that transfers to a baccalaureate program is virtually guaranteed. The only obstacle is the inability to pay the bill. If students and parents had to pay for college from yearly disposable income, many fewer baccalaureate degree-granting institutions would be in operation. But government enables payment for a college education to be partially ignored or postponed through financial aid programs; thus, the availability of financial aid is the second enabler. How each of these variables fuels the *one way to win* mentality is discussed next.

SECTION I

The "Pressure" to Go to College From Parents and Others

The "go-to-college" message in today's society is everywhere. Faith in the axiom that college is good has converted nearly everyone. According to one Gallup poll (*Phi Delta Kappan*, 1994), 93% of respondents said college was important to individual future success. The reinforcement to the go-to-college message pops up when one least expects it. Even our local automatic teller machine greets patrons with the question, "Need money for college?"; it hints of possible profits ($) from college mania.

The pressure on high school seniors to continue their education is intense and relentless. It takes a lot of courage not to go to a 4-year college, especially if one is academically blessed. Perhaps the best evidence lies in the sheer number of students who want to go on to higher education. Anyone who has ever worked with high school students knows that the likelihood of getting 95% to agree on anything, even pizza and rock and roll, is about as likely as successfully herding cats. Thus, when 95% of graduating seniors say they plan to go on to higher education, and nationally almost 70% actually do, the intensity and effectiveness of the press to go to college can be appreciated. The pressure is applied in the form of well-intentioned advice first from parents.

Pressure from Parents

Although most teens who go to college will say they made the decision themselves, their decision was not made in a vacuum. Parents seem to be the important group influencing them. For example, Hossler and Stage (1992) found that parents' expectations were the single best predictor of going to college; this was particularly true in low-income homes.

If the importance given to parental advice is true, one would expect that, given the dramatic increase in college attendance, more parents are recommending college. NCES data confirm this hypothesis (see Table 2.1). On average, the go-to-college message from parents has

TABLE 2.1 Recommending College in Sophomore Years for 1982 and 1992 High School Graduates

	Father		*Mother*		*Guidance Counselor*		*Teachers*	
	1982	*1992*	*1982*	*1992*	*1982*	*1992*	*1982*	*1992*
Total	59.1	77.0	64.8	82.9	32.3	65.2	32.3	65.5
Male	55.6	74.0	61.6	80.7	32.2	64.0	32.1	64.2
Female	63.5	80.0	68.6	85.2	32.7	66.3	32.5	66.8
Low SES	36.7	58.0	47.0	66.5	24.9	56.1	26.3	59.0
Middle SES	57.4	76.6	63.9	84.2	30.1	63.6	30.1	63.8
High SES	84.5	94.5	86.2	96.7	44.5	77.7	42.7	76.1
Test Quartile								
Lowest	40.4	59.9	47.6	64.7	26.1	56.4	28.2	57.2
Second	49.7	71.7	55.6	79.3	26.1	61.1	26.5	60.7
Third	63.9	83.1	69.2	89.7	31.3	66.4	30.1	65.5
Highest	79.8	90.6	85.1	95.9	43.1	74.3	41.7	75.3

SOURCES: Compiled from *High School and Base Year Student Survey*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 1982, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; and *National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, 1992 Second Follow-Up*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 1992, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

increased by 15% to 20% for both males and females. In the class of 1992, 85.2% of young women reported that their mothers had recommended college, as compared with 68.6% in the class of 1982. It is also worth noting that, for both genders, mothers are stronger supporters of the go-to-college movement than fathers.

The focus of this book is students from the academic middle. Thus, we are interested in the extent and growth of parental pressure on high school graduates from the lower three quartiles. The growth in the percentage of parents recommending college actually increased fastest among students with the least academic ability. Cases in point are students in the second to lowest quartile, the bottom of the academic middle. The percentage of students in this category who reported that their fathers had recommended college increased 22% in 10 years. Even among those in the lowest quartile, 59.9% reported

that their fathers had recommended college, whereas 64.7% reported that their mothers had recommended college.

These data highlight the dilemma of *one way to win*. The recent increase in the number going to college stems from the fact that greater percentages of students from the lower quartiles of academic ability are now going to college than in the past. Clearly, one important reason is a rather dramatic growth in the proportions of parents advising their children to go on. The tragedy, however, is that many of them are not prepared academically and/or emotionally to be successful.

No doubt, parents of high school students from the academic middle have their children's best interests in mind when they recommend college. They believe in the validity of the *one way to win* paradigm. Our model suggests that this conversion to the "college is good" faith stems from a number of economic issues and social values. Before turning to these issues, we note other sources that exert the college press on academically average students. One such source is the one major social institution they all attend: their local high school.

Pressure From High Schools

The second most powerful source of pressure to go to college comes from the high schools themselves. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, high school staff have always viewed preparing students for college as their most important mission. Typically, the community agrees. Today, the instructional effectiveness of high school and college attendance rates has become one and the same in the public eye. Although high school educators will point to the community for this "college or nothing" criterion for success, it is largely self-imposed and historical in nature. When high schools began to proliferate at the turn of the century, most high school educators saw themselves as saving students from the "dreading influence of the shop floor." This attitude was so common that industrialists openly accused high school educators of discouraging students from entering the trades (Gray, 1980).

Having set themselves up to be judged by the number of students who go to college, it is not surprising that high school staffs them-

selves exert significant overt and covert pressure to go on. Some of this pressure is institutionalized. High schools, for example, sponsor all types of activities aimed at helping students decide to attend college—for example, college fairs, campus visitations, financial aid and college choice workshops for parents, and hosting college recruiters. Similar services and efforts are not made for teens who wish to go directly to work.

In some cases, the institutional pressure exerted by high schools on students to go to college is not particularly subtle. At some high school graduations, for example, the program includes a list of graduates and the colleges they are planning to attend. Now that's pressure. How would you like to be a parent with no college listed after your child's name? How would the child feel?

Perhaps the most repugnant method of institutionalizing the college-is-good message by high schools is the weighted grading policies that give extra value to grades earned in special college prep courses typically taken by the academically blessed. Thus, an A in accounting, a career-related course, counts less than an A in honors English, a college prep course. The message to the student body could not be more obvious: Value is placed on preparation for college; those who are valued here take these courses.

The go-to-college message that is pervasive in high schools also comes directly from the faculty. Among the "true believers" in *one way to win* are high school teachers and even some guidance counselors. Both should know better. Even the pecking order among high school faculty reflects the value placed on college. The teachers with the highest status teach only those preparing for college. According to disturbing research by Oakes (1985) and others, teachers in the average high school have a pejorative view of non-college-bound teens. Apparently, Taylorism—the belief that the wealth of the nation depends on the contributions of the academically blessed, whereas those from the middle and lower ends of the academic spectrum are relatively less important—is alive and well. This theme is explored in later chapters.

This bias in favor of the academically blessed—the college-bound—elite is not new; thus, it contributes little to explanations of the recent and dramatic increase in college attendance among students from the academic middle. What has changed is the extent of teachers' and counselors' enthusiasm for advising students to go to college; it has increased during the last 15 years (see Table 2.1). Again, of particular

interest is the advice given to students in the lower three quartiles. The same pattern of advice observed among parents has been observed among teachers and counselors. The percentage of students in the lower three quartiles who reported that their counselor had recommended college doubled or tripled between 1982 and 1992. An amazing 57.2% of the students in even the lowest quartile said their teachers had recommended that they go to college. The fact that these students chose to report having been so advised indicates the pervasive go-to-college mentality in the nation's high schools. Thus, the go-to-college message heard by academically average teens at home is reinforced at their high schools. This point is rather perplexing because if any group could be expected to realistically assess an individual student's ability to benefit from higher education, it would be high school teachers and counselors. These individuals appear to have assessed the politics and decided instead to "look the other way." This situation is discussed in Chapter 4. Of course, parents and teachers are not the only important influences on today's youth. Media and friends also deliver the message that "there is only *one way to win*—you had better go to college."

Pressure From Peers and the Media

The influence of peer pressure on adolescent behavior is legendary. Just ask any parent who has tried to fight it. This pressure applies not only to fashions and other innocuous matters but also to decisions of substance, such as whether to go to college. Especially as graduation approaches, all conversation eventually turns to one question: "What are you going to do next year?" It is the rare teenager who is willing to say anything but, "I am going to college." The only mildly acceptable alternative is, "I am going to take a year off."

Added to the go-to-college din from parents, teachers, counselors, and friends is a constant barrage of *one way to win* propaganda in the public media. As concern about the economy mounted in the 1980s and especially as the distribution of income between college and high school graduates worsened, the "you had better go to college" message became a common topic in the press. "Job prospects grim without college degree" is a typical example. Similar simplistic headlines on the front pages of the nation's newspapers do not go unnoticed by youth. Equally important, the press plays an important

role in the delivery of the go-to-college message often reinforced by politicians. Even national presidential campaign rhetoric promotes "go to college." When presidential candidates state, "All who want to go to college should be able to," this message all too often is interpreted as meaning that those who do not wish to are deficient in some way.

The go-to-college message from parents, teachers, and friends is nothing new. What is new is its persuasiveness and the fact that it is now delivered to all students regardless of academic ability. This change in attitude toward the appropriateness of "college for everyone" can be traced first to increased anxiety about the economic future of the nation and to conventional wisdom that developed about future career opportunities. Second, it can be attributed to several deep-seated cultural values about equal opportunity and the right to fail.

SECTION II

The Economic and Social Forces Behind *One Way to Win*

Our model is designed to explain graphically the pressure to go to college. The decision by individual students is viewed as the result of influence by important reference groups. These groups—parents, high school faculty, friends, the media—in turn, preach the *one way to win* philosophy because (we assume) they believe in it. Thus, an understanding of the reasons for the message's importance is necessary to those who hope to create openness to alternatives. Three such variables are discussed here: economic uncertainty, the relationship of education and status, and ideology of equal opportunity. Each of these variables leads to a predilection to support the *one way to win* mentality. We begin with an examination of the role of economic uncertainty.

Diminishing Economic Opportunities

The fact that the growth in the percentage of students entering higher education began about the same time as the massive economic

restructuring in this country is less than a coincidence. One result of this restructuring was the permanent loss of many high-wage, low-skill jobs. As a result, the earnings of all except college graduates began to slip. The majority of today's youth and their parents, and perhaps almost everyone else, really are not sure where good work, both rewarding and high paying, will be found in the future. The only thing that now seems certain is the mathematical fact that those with a college degree, on average, earn more than those without one. This well-publicized fact, coupled with murky information about the rise of technical work, has led to several widespread labor market beliefs or assumptions that are mostly myths.

Labor Market Misconceptions

The *one way to win* or college mania mentality has been fueled by misinformation or myths about the future world of work. Five such misconceptions seem to underlie much of the rhetoric behind the *one way to win* mentality:

1. In the future, most jobs will require a college degree.
2. Most high-wage jobs in the future will be in technical fields that require a college degree.
3. The total labor force demand for college graduates is sufficient to ensure employment for all who receive a 4-year college degree.
4. In the light of the oversupply of college graduates, college graduates will displace those without degrees in good jobs that do not require a college degree.
5. Because higher education is highly correlated with future earnings, education guarantees a higher income.

These widely held misconceptions (discussed in detail in Chapter 7) all have some truth or are true in some circumstances. None of these, however, are completely true or true for all. This is especially the case for 4-year college degree seekers from the academic middle. For example, although college graduates as a group currently earn more, on average, than those who are not college graduates, not all college graduates should expect to earn more than all those who do

not hold degrees from 4-year colleges, nor should they believe that this economic benefit is the result of education alone. Also, the higher yearly earnings of current college graduates do not guarantee a college-level job to those who obtain a 4-year degree in the future, as many seem to think. Also hidden are the costs of getting a 4-year degree, including the interest on student loans that may well offset increased earnings. For some students, some of these labor market misconceptions may be partially true; for other students, they may be false. For example, technical work may be, on a percentage basis, the fastest growing segment of the workplace and the most likely to create high-skill jobs that pay high wages (high skill/high wage work); but the largest and fastest growing ranks of technical workers are not college-trained professionals; they are blue-collar technicians educated at the pre-baccalaureate postsecondary level, in high school vocational education programs, or in formal training programs in the workplace.

The importance of uncertainty about the future labor market in fueling the *one way to win* mentality cannot be overstated. The lesson for those who hope to persuade students, parents, teachers, and the public that there are *other ways to win* is that a sound, plausible economic argument, such as that presented in Chapter 7, will be necessary. Economic uncertainty about future labor market opportunities alone, however, does not adequately explain the go-to-college press that existed to a lesser extent even during the post-World War II economic golden years. Other forces at work center on social status and a prejudice toward nonprofessional work, as well as on deep-seated cultural values.

Social Class and Status

Even before the onset of economic uncertainty, the press to go to college was still very strong. Obviously, something other than economic uncertainty is at work. One such factor in the United States is the relationship between social class and/or status and college attendance inherited from our English forebearers. Academicians are fond of portraying the benefits of higher education in terms of a more fulfilling and rewarding life. In reality, however, long before college had anything to do with careers other than medicine, law, or the clergy, higher education was popular for an entirely different reason: It was a vestige of social class and status. As the British aristocracy

grew in number, the number of titles that could be bestowed by the monarch did not. A new vestige was needed—something less vulgar than just money—and college was ideal. Because at first few could afford to attend college, it was the perfect status symbol separating "gentlemen" from the masses. This value was brought to the United States and is very much alive and well. Even though higher education is very accessible, having a college degree is equated with the middle and upper classes. Thus, the relationship between social class identity, status, and college is a strong force behind the go-to-college message. This force is a particularly powerful reason for parental advice to go to college (more about this in Chapter 4). One related aspect of the correlation among social class identity, status, and college is a less overt but no less powerful prejudice against "dirty," "blue-collar," nonprofessional work.

The Prejudice Against Nonprofessional Work

Although the public may support the platitude that there is dignity in all work, the only work given much status is professional work. "My daughter the doctor" or "my son the lawyer" is still the standard against which all else is compared. Evidence for this point of view could fill several books, but for the sake of brevity let's examine a standard occupational listing that ranks occupational fields in the order researchers have found that U.S. society assigns to each (see Table 2.2).

It is not surprising to find professionals at the top and unskilled labor at the bottom. The middle rankings, however, are the interesting ones. Notice that skilled occupations are listed below semiprofessional occupations despite the fact that most skilled occupations pay higher wages than most semiprofessional jobs—higher even than some professional occupations. Skilled precision workers continue to have higher average earnings than schoolteachers, so why are colleges full of students preparing to be teachers when there are jobs for only a fraction of them? Why is hardly anyone preparing for careers in the crafts? The reason is related to status. Teachers may not have the status of a doctor, a lawyer, or even an accountant, but they have more status than a precision metal worker who earns considerably more than they do.

TABLE 2.2 Occupation Classification by Level

Classification	*Occupation*
1. Professional Managerial (higher)	Doctor, Lawyer, Professor
2. Professional Managerial (lower)	Teacher, Engineer
3. Semiprofessional and Management	Librarian, Nurse, Photographer
4. Skilled	Medical Lab Technician, Machinist
5. Semiskilled	Fire Fighter, Truck Driver
6. Unskilled	Laborer

SOURCE: From A new classification of occupations, by A. Roe. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 3,* 1954. Copyright by *American Psychological Association;* used with permission.

This message is conveyed to youth: White- or striped-collar jobs are valued; all others are not. Furthermore, the belief is that those who do nonprofessional work are not very bright and are ill-mannered and generally unsophisticated. These stereotypes are reinforced in the media by the likes of Al Bundy and Homer Simpson, the so-called Joe six-packs. Aside from social class and status, several other deep-seated cultural values create a fertile climate for the *one way to win* mentality. Chief among them is the importance given in the United States to ensuring "equal opportunity" and the related belief in the "right to fail."

The Ideology of Equal Opportunity

The United States of America is frequently referred to as the land of opportunity. Such platitudes reflect a basic value in U.S. culture that affects the public's thinking about many things, including higher education. This basic value also creates a climate for acceptance of the *one way to win* mentality. In a nation where almost everyone's ancestors came from somewhere else and the reason they came was the promise of a better life, keeping open avenues or opportunities for a better life for the nation's youth has strong support. The popu-

lation in general and educators in particular have tried not to pressure youth to make decisions too early that could limit future opportunity. Historically, this has been a strong argument against high school vocational education, which many viewed as requiring a career decision too early in life. This view is one backbone of the belief that as many students as possible should be sent to college. In recent times, opportunity and college have come to be viewed as one and the same. College recruiters know this and play on it heavily. Marketing slogans such as "Imagine the impossible, then do it" and "This fall is not too late to turn your life around" (both gleaned from the *New York Times*) are typical plays on the doctrine of equal opportunity. This doctrine not only promotes college mania but also makes the topics of rising costs, lack of ability, or adequate preparation for college work difficult to deal with. Even though it is obvious that encouraging everyone to go to college may not be such a good idea. This is especially true since college has come to be viewed as the great provider of equal opportunity.

As suggested more than 20 years ago by the eminent sociologist Burton Clark (1962), a consistent problem in democracies is that although the culture encourages aspirations, it is ineffective in providing equal opportunity to achieve them. This dilemma, argues Clark, is a strong motivator behind the conventional wisdom he calls the "ideology of equal opportunity." It argues that society should provide unlimited access to higher education. As Clark points out, "Strictly interpreted, equality of opportunity means selection [to college] according to ability, without regard to extraneous considerations. Popularly interpreted, however, equal opportunity in obtaining a college education is widely taken to mean 'unlimited access' " (p. 570).

This ideology of equal opportunity is a strong force behind the *one way to win* mentality. Even suggesting that unlimited access to higher education may not be in the interests of either the nation or its citizens puts one at risk of being politically incorrect. This fear may be one reason that few question college mania. Instead of confronting the problem, society has chosen what Clark refers to as the "soft response": Funds are provided to ensure unlimited access and thus allow a sort of higher education Darwinism to take place as half slowly drop out or, as Clark suggests, "cool out." Of course, the irony is that those who cool out are those whom the doctrine of opportunity was supposed to help the most; instead, they are most likely to fail. It is difficult to understand how they are supposed to benefit from

the experience (this reality is discussed in Chapter 3). Raising even these questions is problematic because of the second deep-seated belief about youth—namely, that they have the right to try and the right to fail.

In most countries, the idea of supporting the attendance of large numbers of youth in college who do not have the academic ability and/or preparation to be successful would be unimaginable, and dropout rates of 50% would be intolerable. But this belief is not shared in the United States, at least not yet. Why? First, until recently, the United States was perhaps the only nation that could afford these social inefficiencies. Second, this situation is tolerated because of a basic value that career development specialist Ken Hoyt (1994) calls the "right to try" and the "right to fail." That "1 in 100" individual who "battles the odds" and succeeds despite a poor high school record seems always to be in the back of the minds of Americans. Because of such outside possibilities of success, the nation has been willing to let the Darwinian "cooling out" process in higher education take its course. Of course, to do so, two final enabling ingredients are needed: open college admissions and student financial aid.

SECTION III

The Enablers Behind *One Way to Win:* Open Admissions and Financial Aid

In this chapter, we have discussed the various groups that deliver the *one way to win*—go-to-college—message and the economic fears, misconceptions, ideologies, and values that lead them to do so. It is interesting to observe that, to varying degrees, these pressure groups, economic uncertainties, and social values exist in all other nations. The United States may be unique only in its belief in the "right to choose" and its complacency about those who fail, yet, it leads in the percentage of all youth who go to college. In France, for example, 28% go on; in Great Britain, 13%; and in Germany, 20% (Hoyt, 1994). Why? Obviously, factors in the United States that enable graduating high school students to play the *one way to win* game regardless of academic ability do not exist abroad. Two enablers predominate: empty college seats and government-supported student financial aid.

Open College Admissions

As frequently as college faculties deny it, higher education is a business in which the number of suppliers—colleges—continues to grow and the number of traditional customers—graduating high school seniors—continues to dwindle. By way of illustration, between 1981 and 1991 the number of colleges and universities in the United States actually increased by 328, whereas the number of high school graduates decreased by 250,000 (NCES, 1992). According to Paul Fussell (1983), writer, social commentator, and a leading cynic about college mania, more institutions now call themselves universities in the state of Ohio alone than there are in unified Germany.

This excess of college seats supercharges college mania in two ways. First, it removes the obstacle of admissions standards; as enrollment declines, colleges take in fewer qualified applicants and then finally all applicants. This situation led Albert Shanker to comment that all newborn babies should just be given a college degree at birth because academic ability and/or academic achievement in high school is no longer needed.

Second, it promotes the *one way to win* mentality in a subtler way. Declining enrollments have become the principal issue at most colleges. "Enrollment management" is a very big issue in higher education. Make no mistake—the goal is to keep the classes and dorm rooms full.

Marketing efforts to fill empty college dorm rooms and classes have become sophisticated and extensive. The most prevalent advertising tactic used in these campaigns is to play on the hopes and fears behind the *one way to win* mentality. The net result is that, in the efforts to fill seats, higher education spends millions of dollars each semester to promote the go-to-college message. By doing so, it reinforces the *one way to win* mentality. Thus, aside from parents, high school faculty, and friends, colleges themselves are probably the biggest source of go-to-college rhetoric. The product they are promoting is expensive, but this was not a problem until recently because the government was more than willing to pay.

Nonmerit Financial Aid

Because the doors to higher education are wide open, the only problem is obtaining the money to pay tuition bills. Even this is not quite the problem it could be, because of the availability of financial

aid. As reported earlier, the majority of students in college now receive financial aid. Importantly, this aid is awarded, not on merit or on need and merit, but just on need. Thus, although in the distant past excellent academic credentials were needed to get a scholarship or grant, this is no longer true. Rightly or wrongly, this need-based rather than merit-based financial aid philosophy, coupled with excess higher education capacity, has put college within reach of marginally qualified students from the academic middle. We are not saying that costs are not a problem (they are an increasingly important issue with parents), but need-based financial aid softens the risks of going to college unprepared and is an important enabler of the *one way to win* mentality.

Other Ways to Win

In this chapter, we explored the forces behind the *one way to win* mentality. National survey research suggests that the most direct reason for increased college attendance among seemingly unqualified students is a change in attitude among parents, teachers, and counselors about the need to go to college regardless of preparation. This change in attitude can be traced most directly to economic uncertainty and related myths about future labor market opportunities. These fears and the *one way to win* solution are then buttressed by deep-seated cultural values about class identification, the superiority of professional work, the perceived relationship between college and equal opportunity, and the right to choose and the right to fail.

The United States has created a form of higher education Darwinism that allows all to try. From admission onward, the emphasis is on survival of the fittest among students. The costs of this cooling out process were described in Chapter 1. It is particularly costly to those who need help the most—namely, those from the academic middle of the nation's graduating high school senior classes. The irony is that, in this group, youth from disadvantaged homes and females in general bear the brunt of the damage done by providing only *one way to win*. These groups would benefit most from the creation of *other ways to win*.

Note

1. Mark Pitsch, 1994, p. 4. Copyright © 1994, *Education Week*. Rprinted by permission.

3

Limited Options for Special Populations

Sometimes when people start out to do good, evil follows.
Daniel Patrick Moynihan[1]

If the percentage of graduating high school seniors enrolling in 4-year colleges immediately after graduation is any indication, the *one way to win* paradigm—the conventional wisdom that a baccalaureate degree and professional work are the only ways to the American dream—has become a pervasive, widely shared belief. A close look reveals that even a majority of recent high school graduates enrolled in 2-year colleges actually are taking general studies programs designed to prepare them for transfer to a 4-year baccalaureate degree program. Although the validity of the paradigm's advice is questionable, the real dilemma is the financial and personal costs to those who follow the advice. These costs are measured in terms of decreased international economic competitiveness, tuition dollars and student loans, and human failure, alienation, and unmet expectations. Although this harm takes its toll on all youth—surprising numbers of the academically blessed drop out during their freshman year—those students who comprise the academic middle of the nation's high schools are disproportionately harmed. Within this group, two subgroups—those from economically disadvantaged

households and young women—are particularly vulnerable. These two subgroups are the focus of this chapter.

Our argument here is that although the motives of those promoting the pursuit of a 4-year degree and professional work as the end-all strategy to equal opportunity for disadvantaged youth and to closing the wage gap between men and women are sincere, they are, unfortunately, also naively optimistic and ultimately harmful. Ironically, by advocating and valuing only one alternative—obtaining a 4-year college degree—they may be doing more harm than good to many of those they seek to help the most. The youth in the two subgroups they hope to help—those from disadvantaged families and young women—are most likely to be hurt by indiscriminately advising the academic middle to go to a 4-year college in the hope of landing a job in the professional ranks.

SECTION I

Economically Disadvantaged Youth

The percentage of all youth who grow up in impoverished homes is growing, even when the head of the household works. According to Census Bureau data, one in every six households in the United States is below the poverty level ($14,746 for a family of four), which is a 35% increase since 1979. In 1979, 12% of all full-time employees earned less than $12,000; by 1990, the figure had increased to 18%. The outlook for the future is not good despite a period of economic growth. As stated in *The Forgotten Half* (W. T. Grant Foundation, 1988),

> One of the cruelest myths of contemporary American life is the claim that our economy is healthy because unemployment is relatively low. This assertion conveniently hides the radical job market changes of recent years, the dilemma of one-parent families, the growing number of working poor, as well as the large number of people who have simply stopped looking for work. (p. 20)

Thus, the gap between what Secretary of Labor Robert Reich calls the "overclass" and the "underclass" is growing. The net result is that

proportionally more youth grow up in impoverished homes. At this time, 1 in 5—or roughly 8.4 million white, 4.6 million African American, and 3 million Hispanic—youth under the age of 18 live in households below the poverty level (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993, p. 470).

Breaking the poverty cycle for these youth is a perplexing social problem. Unfortunately, policymakers seem unable to agree on solutions except to send as many youth from disadvantaged homes as possible to higher education. Although advocates of this policy may define higher education broadly to include 2-year institutions, no one should be surprised that the message heard by low-income parents and students is that they should do all they can to obtain a baccalaureate degree. Thus, a legitimate question is this: Is indiscriminately advising all disadvantaged youth to get a 4-year degree in order to be successful in life really such a good idea, or could they benefit from some alternatives? Logic alone would suggest alternatives, but let's examine the issue further.

Although in the past disadvantaged youth were targeted for the "stay in high school and graduate" message, increases in graduation rates for the same group have led to a new message: "If you want to be somebody, get a college degree." This is very appropriate advice for some disadvantaged youth; it is nothing short of a question of national pride that disadvantaged youth who are ready to benefit from a 4-year college program may go, no matter what. Our concern, however, is this: Is it a good idea to tell disadvantaged youth, particularly those in the academic middle, that getting ahead requires a 4-year college degree? In particular, should anyone suggest to those who have little hope to start with that a 4-year college education is their only hope? Unfortunately, this message will be interpreted by many of the disadvantaged to mean that they have no hope at all.

In his book *Street Wise*, Elijah Anderson (1990) argues that, among urban youth, the best predictor of persistence and success in school is "hope" for a better future. At the same time, according to other researchers, although low-income youth may have the same ambitions as their more blessed peers, their expectations for achieving these goals are significantly less. Thus, although hope is critical to breaking the poverty cycle, telling economically disadvantaged youth that the only hope is a 4-year college is counterproductive. For many, a 4-year college degree is beyond their perception of the possible. As

a result, they end up with no hope. Some drop out for a life on the streets or dead-end jobs; others find it safer and socially acceptable to stay in school with their friends. The latter group come to school each day but tune out when in class. These youth deserve better. Holding out only one valued alternative—a 4-year college degree—is cruel and unethical and does them more harm than good. Among those in the academic middle of U.S. high schools, disadvantaged youth from both urban and rural areas have perhaps the most to gain from creating *other ways to win*.

Urban ghettoes are a good example of the harm that can be done by the *one way to win* mentality because it is arguably one reason for the "I don't care" attitude among youth. When urban youth label some of their peers "wannabes," they are talking about those who, in their view, have been sucked into the *one way to win* or go-to-college myth that they associate with being white or middle class. In at least one respect, urban youth may be the smartest of all, or at least the most honest about the future. They see the futility of *one way to win* for them; unlike their white middle-class counterparts from the academic middle of U.S. high schools, they do not indulge in self-delusion or misplaced optimism. They may be the only ones who see that although college may be the answer for some, it can never be the answer for all. To act as if it were is just plain dumb—it's "wannabe." Given no other alternatives, many give up.

Another reason for caution among those who promote 4-year college education indiscriminately to all economically disadvantaged youth is the sobering reality that the odds are very good that more than half of those who take this advice will fail and that the price of failure will be harsh. Why? First, youth from impoverished backgrounds are less academically prepared, in general, to be successful in college. For instance, the average combined SAT score for low SES students in 1992 was 747, compared with 943 for high SES students (OERI, 1994). Thus, youth from low-income homes who graduate in the academic middle of their high school class and go on to a 4-year college typically end up in less prestigious but more expensive private colleges, are more likely to have to take remedial or developmental courses, and are more likely to drop out or cool out. Perhaps the cruelest aspect of this scenario is that, unlike those from middle-class homes who can expect some help with student loan debts and job leads if they fail to graduate, those from disadvan-

taged homes are on their own. It is no wonder that they default on student loans in disproportionate numbers.

To further illustrate this latter point, recall the parable of the high-jumping society developed in Chapter 1 to illustrate the individual harm done when youth are provided with only *one way to win;* in this fable, it was jumping over a 6-foot fence. Despite the best motives, the actual effect of *one way to win* on youth from impoverished homes is analogous in our parable to encouraging these students to try the high jump while knowing that their odds of succeeding are poor. But the situation is worse because, in reality, we also know that the landing mat that middle-class families provide to cushion the fall if their jumpers fail does not exist for those from disadvantaged homes. For these students, it is as if we ask them to try the jump and take the mat away, ensuring that if they fail they will be hurt much worse than the rest. Is this really fair? Is the advice of those advocating *one way to win* really good for these students if they are from the academic middle?

Now we ask: Does this grim picture mean that low-income youth should be discouraged from 4-year higher education? No, of course not. Although some will argue that everyone should have an equal right to fail, we argue that until society can ensure equal probabilities of success and equal costs of failure for all youth, indiscriminately promoting a 4-year college education to low-income youth from the academic middle of the nation's high schools sets up too many for failure. Such a situation could, in fact, be construed as a conspiracy to ensure their failure. Youth from economically disadvantaged homes desperately need hope, alternatives, and *other ways to win.*

SECTION II

Women and the Gender Wage Gap

One way to win seems to have become part of national conventional wisdom, and female high school graduates appear to be the most zealous. According to current estimates, some 800,000 more women than men are now enrolled in higher education. Women also are increasing in number in graduate schools. Reversing a historical trend, in 1993 higher percentages of female freshmen than male

freshmen enrolled in institutions of higher education indicated they planned to obtain an advanced degree (American Council on Education, 1994a). Like their male counterparts, women go to college for economic reasons. Just as many females as males indicate that they are going to college "to be able to get a better job" (see Table 1.2), and more females than males indicate that "being successful in work" and "being able to find steady work" are very important for their future (see Table 1.3).

This increase in women in higher education is, by itself, cause for celebration, because it indicates a changing attitude toward women's roles in the labor force and society; though to the degree that women outnumber men in higher education, so too will women outnumber men among the losers in the *one way to win* game. But a unique additional concern that applies particularly to women needs to be discussed. It stems from the lopsided nature of their expressed career ambitions and the continuing gap in wages for men and women.

Compared with men, virtually all women express the same career plan: to pursue a career in the professions. In the NELS 88 study of 1992 high school graduates, 68.8% of females said they expected to be working in the professions by the time they were 30 years old, compared with 48.8% of males. Of particular note, 0.4% expected to be working in precision metal/crafts/specialized repair occupations, and 3.7% expected to be working as technicians.

Some would argue that these young women are responding to the economic and social realities they face. The gender wage gap persists, with the only group of women outearning their male counterparts being highly educated women in the professions. Some female high school seniors have surely read about the gender wage gap. Even if they have not, the only role models they see in the media are women in the professions. Unfortunately, their faith in college and the professions is not well placed. Contrary to conventional wisdom, 48% of all workers in the professions are already women. Clearly, the demand for professional personnel will never be large enough to accommodate 68.8% of women high school graduates. Thus, the *one way to win* paradigm, and particularly its advice about seeking a career in the professional ranks, will ensure that women are the biggest losers. Meanwhile, some researchers who seek to narrow the gender wage gap have concluded that the problem is no longer too few women executives but too few women in other high skill/high wage occupations.

In the past, economists' traditional explanation for the gender wage gap was that women were less likely to go on to higher education and that this smaller investment in their human capital caused them to earn less in the workforce. This rationale was the main reason that the feminist movement made increased participation rates for women in higher education an early priority. To a certain extent, this tactic worked. The gender wage gap did narrow as college graduation rates for women improved. Yet, in the 1980s, progress slowed even though graduation rates of college females continued to increase. Researchers probing this phenomenon found that the return in future earnings for an additional year of education was now less for women than for men (Gray & Huang, 1994; Terrell, 1992). The implication is that unless the percentages of women who go on to college dramatically and consistently exceed those for men and unless women also dramatically outnumber men in high-wage professions, college attendance may not narrow the wage gap further.

The problem is that although women are gaining parity in the professions, they are seriously underrepresented in high-paying nonprofessional careers. Table 3.1 lists the six occupational groups identified by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. This classification is used often in this book. In Table 3.1, the occupational groups are not listed alphabetically, but rather from highest to lowest according to the average yearly income of those who work in each group. The table reports the percentage of women employed in each occupational group. The message is clear: Although women have nearly gained parity (47%) in the highest paid managerial and professional group, they represent only 9% of the labor force in the second highest paid group—craft, precision metal, specialized repair. Furthermore, although women reportedly comprise 64% of technical support workers, this category includes clerical workers and so is misleading. A look at other nonclerical technical support occupations also reveals that women are very underrepresented.

Breaking down the barriers to occupations that do not traditionally include women is the real feminist challenge in the future. Telling all women that they should go to college in the hope of entering the professional ranks—the *one way to win* message—is counterproductive. History has already proven that too many women take this advice only to end up employed in clerical positions because they could not obtain a teaching job or get into law school. Meanwhile,

TABLE 3.1 Occupational Groups Ranked by Earnings and Percentage Female

	Earning	*Percentage Female (%)*
Managerial/Professional	1	47
Craft, Precision Metal, Specialized Repair	2	9
Technical Support	3	64
Operative, Laborer	4	25
Service	5	60
Farming, Fishing	6	16

SOURCES: Data compiled from "Job-Related Education and Training: Their Impact on Earnings," by A. Eck, 1993, *Monthly Labor Review*, pp. 21-38; and *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1994*, by U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994, Washington, DC: Author.

the demand for women in high-skill/high-wage occupations that require only a prebaccalaureate postsecondary education is staggering. We need to help young female high school graduates see that there are *other ways to win*.

Other Ways to Win

One major way the *one way to win* mentality is promoted is from the well-intended efforts of government, advocacy groups, and individuals who are hopeful that a 4-year college education will break the poverty cycle and improve the earnings of females relative to males. Unfortunately, the pursuit of a 4-year college degree in preparation for a professional career is an appropriate strategy for only some low-income youth and some women; it is not realistic for all, particularly for those from the academic middle. First, many impoverished youth view college as an impossible wannabe dream, and without alternatives, they lose hope and give up. But among the impoverished youth who do not give up and do enter college, those from the academic middle are, on average, the least prepared to be successful, the most likely to have to take remedial course work, the

most likely to drop out or cool out, and the least able to cope with the financial consequences. Likewise, some argue that the *one way to win* mentality is leading a majority of young females from the academic middle of high school seniors down a labor market path to professions that is too narrow to accommodate them. Meanwhile, other more promising career paths for women go untraveled.

Of course, these arguments demand proof that (a) those in the academic middle are unprepared to do college-level work, (b) when they go to college they do not do well, and (c) those who do graduate will face a very overcrowded labor market for 4-year college graduates. We provide this evidence and discuss the reasons for the public's blind eye toward this travesty in Part 2 of this book. Our discussion begins in Chapter 4 with an honest look at the high school academic preparation of students who make up the academic middle.

Note

1. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 1994, August 7. *The New York Times Magazine*, p. 26. Copyright © 1994 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.

PART II

Counting the Losers in the *One Way to Win* Game

4

Preparing High School Graduates

Questionable Academics and Second-Class Status

The message that flows out to American high school kids is that it makes absolutely no difference how well you do [in high school] because it doesn't matter.

M. Tucker (1994, p. 7)[1]

At one time, going to college was unusual; today, the high school graduate who goes directly to work is the oddity. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in any given year during the 1990s, on average, 1.5 million high school graduates will enroll immediately in higher education, whereas only 560,000—less than 20%—of all graduates will go to work or enter the military. Of those in higher education, two thirds enroll in 4-year colleges, and at least half of those who enroll in 2-year institutions are not taking occupational programs but general studies courses (U.S. Department of Labor, 1993). Thus, of all high school graduates, the vast majority go to college and the largest group enroll in 4-year colleges or 2-year programs in preparation for transfer to a baccalaureate degree program. Is this a positive development? Perhaps not,

if many are academically unprepared to benefit from the experience. Thus, it seems prudent to ask this question: How many of these 1.5 million new college freshmen are prepared to do college work? Our focus of analysis is the effectiveness of the revered and respected high school college prep curriculum.

SECTION I

How Effective Is the College Prep Program of Study?

To appreciate the impact of the *one way to win* paradigm on U.S. high schools, a look at the courses that students take is necessary. Before the early 1980s, few students took the college preparatory (college prep) curriculum; today, the opposite is the case. Between 1982 and 1990, the national percentage of students reporting enrollment in a college prep program increased by 10% (OERI, 1994); by 1990, 54% of all 17-year-olds in high school said they were enrolled in college prep courses.

These data, however, do not represent the true percentage of all high school students who are, in varying degrees, taking courses designed to prepare them for college. Specifically, the data fail to consider the 37% of high school students who are in the "general" curriculum. Very few high schools still have something called a general curriculum. Experienced high school educators will verify that many of those categorized as general students are, in fact, quasi-college-prep students—students who take some, but not all, of the traditional college prep course sequence. Thus, if the number of those who report enrollment in college prep courses were combined with the number of students in general courses, the total would be as high as 80%. No doubt, the true number is somewhere in the middle—perhaps 65%. As one indication of the trend, the Vermont Department of Education reported that the percentage of students who completed the college prep curriculum increased from 43% in 1978 to 63% in 1990 (Vermont Department of Education, 1991).

A second indication of the trend of increasing enrollment in the college prep program is the decrease of enrollments in vocational education. According to the National Assessment of Vocational Edu-

cation (NAVE), only 10% of 17-year-olds in high school in 1990 said they were enrolled in vocational education (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). In some states, vocational education enrollments have declined by 50% since the early 1980s. In particular, the percentage of high school students who take a concentrated sequence of vocational courses designed to prepare them for competitive employment declined by 18% between 1982 and 1990. Thus, as enrollments in college prep courses swell, the percentage of students who graduate and are actually prepared to be competitive in the workforce nationally is now, at best, 20%. Of this group, more than half are students with C or lower grade point averages and/or students with disabilities.

Most high school students in the academic middle no longer concentrate in vocational education programs such as business education, vocational agriculture, or building construction trades programs. Instead, they take a college prep program of study. But which one?

Part of the subterfuge caused by the growth of the *one way to win* mentality and the corresponding growth in the number of students who wish to take college prep courses has been the bifurcation of the college prep curriculum to distinguish between the truly academically blessed and those from the academic middle. Today, in virtually all high schools in the United States, at least two college prep programs are going on simultaneously: One consists of the regular college prep courses; the other consists of the college "honors" or "advanced placement" (AP) courses. Most would consider the latter to be the college prep program of old.

The mere existence of these two levels of college prep programs hints that one group of students may not be getting quite the same preparation as the other. In fact, surprisingly, no one seems concerned, or at least has questioned, the effectiveness of an unreformed college prep curriculum that would serve all who enroll in it. Yet, what if the percentage of those who actually graduate with credentials that predict success in college declines as the percentage of all students who enroll increases? This trend would indicate a possible problem. It may be appropriate, then, to take a closer look at the actual effectiveness of a college prep program of study in the light of the large number of academically average students enrolling in it.

The College Prep Program and the Academically Average

Increases in enrollments in college prep programs have resulted in surprisingly few investigations into their effectiveness for the academically diverse cohort participating in it. Specifically, if the outcome objective of the college prep program is to prepare students for college admission and success in college-level academic work, how many of those who enroll actually achieve these outcomes? No doubt some do, particularly if the academically blessed are separated into honors classes with the best teachers. But what about the rest? This question is important for those who suspect that the *one way to win* paradigm may, in fact, encourage many academically average teens to pursue postsecondary plans that are unrealistic and doomed to failure.

Some national data hint at the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of college prep programs of study to adequately prepare this growing cohort of high school students. Perhaps the best publicized indicator of these programs' instructional effectiveness is college entrance test results. Although not as powerful a predictor as high school grades, scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or American College Testing Program (ACT) do predict success in college. Thus, as the percentage of students taking the tests has increased, the scores have decreased. This trend has led to speculation that more and more students from the academic middle are taking the tests but not doing very well. Of course, among the many limitations of this comparison is the fact that those who take the tests are not a random sample of those who plan to go to college. For example, in some states, fewer than 7% of those applying to college take the tests. Thus, better indicators are the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing program, coupled with the previously discussed NELS 88 second follow-up survey of a national sample of 1992 graduating seniors (NCES, 1992).

The NELS 88 data set contains data regarding plans to continue education immediately after high school and NAEP equivalent proficiency scores in reading, math, and science. Table 4.1 indicates the percentage of students in this national sample who said they planned to continue their education immediately and their different levels of proficiency. At least the majority of those who plan to go on to higher education should score at the higher proficiency levels on each of the

TABLE 4.1 Percentage of 1992 College-Bound Seniors Who Were Proficient in NAEP Assessment

Subject	*Level I*	*Level II*	*Level III*	*Level IV*	*Level V*
Reading	95%	67%	37%		
Math	96%	80%	65%	40%	5%
Science	85%	59%	26%		

SOURCE: Compiled from *National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, 1992 Second Follow-Up*, by the National Center for Educational Statistics, 1992, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
NOTE: Math test has five levels. Scores are calculated NAEP equivalence.

three tests. The data reveal the opposite to be true. Only 37% were proficient at the highest level in reading, 5% in math, and 26% in science. On the basis of these test data, of those who said they were going to college, at best only about one third seem to have skills that suggest adequate preparation.

Of course, inferring the effectiveness of a college prep program from the reported NELS 88 data has its limitations. For example, how many of those who indicated plans to go to college actually took the college prep courses in high school? If they did, how extensive was their participation? Better data on the effectiveness of the traditional college prep program are provided by Gray, Malizia, and Wang's 1993 study of the high school and post-high school experiences of 1991 graduates.

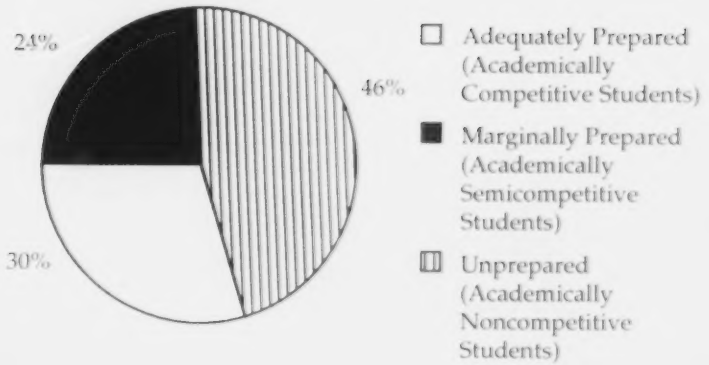
This study examined the high school and postsecondary experiences of graduates from seven suburban high schools in the East. In these high schools, going to college was the goal of virtually all students. For example, 81% took the SAT—twice the national average—yet average SAT scores for this group exceeded the national average for that year by almost 100 points. Thus, although these high schools were not typical, there were several advantages in using them to investigate the effectiveness of the traditional college prep program. First, because virtually all students were enrolled in the college prep program (there was no formal "general" curriculum) and only 7% of graduates had concentrated in vocational education, these schools provided a rich opportunity to examine the experiences of those in the academic middle who had taken college prep. Second, because these were arguably among the best high schools in the

country, the effectiveness of their college prep programs would represent a high-water mark.

The Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study

The investigation described in *The Class of 1991: One Year Later* (Gray et al., 1993, referred to below as The Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study), began with an examination of the high school transcripts of all graduates, particularly regarding levels of math, science, and foreign languages taken; 4-year grade point average (GPA); and combined SAT test scores. These data were then used to determine how many students actually earned credentials associated with admission to competitive colleges and to predict academic success. Using the criteria outlined in Figure 4.1, all graduates in the study were divided into three groups. *Academically competitive students* were those who graduated with credentials used by the NAVE study (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 111) to count academically advanced high school graduates; *academically semicompetitive students* were those with a minimal set of credentials that suggested marginal ability to do college-level work without remediation; and *academically noncompetitive students* were those whose high school records indicated inadequate preparation to do college-level work without significant remediation. The results of the division are displayed in Figure 4.1. These eye-openers perfectly illustrate the need to create *other ways to win*.

As shown by the data presented in Figure 4.1, being in the college prep program does not guarantee graduation with credentials that suggest readiness to do college-level work. In arguably seven of the best high schools in the nation, only 30% graduated with a set of college prep courses, a B average, and combined SAT scores of 1,000. Even in these high schools, the college prep program of study would seem to have prepared only one third to be competitive in the admissions process at those institutions that are still selective and to do college-level academic work without remediation. Interestingly, this is exactly the same percentage of seniors who took the 1991 NAEP test and were found to have taken the advanced academic course sequence (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 111). This finding does much to recommend the validity of generalizing the results of the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study.



	3 Years College Prep Math	*2 Years Lab Science*	*2 Years Same Foreign Language*	*Combined SAT Scores*	*High School GPA*
Prepared	Yes	Yes	Yes	≥ 1000	B
Marginal	Yes	Yes	Yes	≥ 800	C
Unprepared	No	No	No	No	No

Figure 4.1. Percentage of High School Graduates Prepared to Do College-Level Academics: Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study
SOURCE: From *The Class of 1991: One Year Later*, by K. Gray, S. Malizia, and D. Wang, 1993. Unpublished research report.

It can be argued that the advanced academics criterion used to identify the academically competitive student is too stringent. After all, in an era of open admissions at many colleges, the criterion that should be used is a minimum set of standards that would predict readiness to do college-level work without significant remediation. Thus, a second count was conducted by using a lesser set of credentials to identify the semicompetitive students. Through use of semicompetitive credentials, another 24% were added; this addition yielded a total of 54% who possibly were ready to benefit from going to college and had a fighting chance of winning the *one way to win* game. The remaining 46%, by the most liberal standards, graduated

TABLE 4.2 Post High School Pursuits of Respondents: Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study

	Full-Time Student	*Full-Time Student Working Part-Time*	*Full-Time Employment*	*Part-Time Employment*	*Other*
Prepared (academically competitive)	71%	27%	1%	1%	0%
Marginally Prepared (academically semicompetitive)	55%	36%	4%	5%	0%
Unprepared (academically noncompetitive)	23%	33%	29%	10%	5%
Total	46%	32%	14%	6%	2%

SOURCE: From *The Class of 1991: One Year Later*, by K. Gray, S. Malizia, and D. Wang, 1993. Unpublished research report.

without the credentials needed to perform college-level work. As will be shown, however, they went to college anyway.

Going to College: Do Credentials Matter?

As part of the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study, a questionnaire was mailed to graduates 1 year after graduation. First, we asked them to tell us where they were on October 1 following their graduation. The results are displayed in Table 4.2: 78% of all respondents from all three academic competitiveness groups had gone on to higher education. Not surprising, 98% of the academically competitive students and 91% of the academically semicompetitive students were in college.

What about the group that interests us most, the 46% who graduated with an academic record suggesting that college is not a wise choice? Amazingly, 56% of these graduates were also in higher education. This finding is surprising for three reasons: None of these

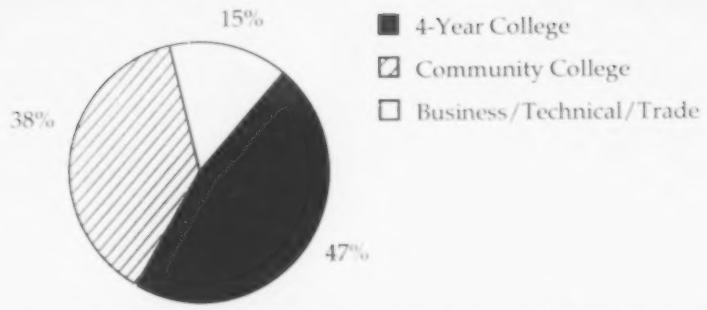


Figure 4.2. Postsecondary Attendance: Academically Unprepared Noncompetitive Students: Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study
SOURCE: From *The Class of 1991: One Year Later*, by K. Gray, S. Malizia, and D. Wang, 1993. Unpublished research report.

graduates (a) had a combined SAT score of over 800, (b) had taken a complete sequence of college prep courses, or (c) had maintained a C average. The expectation at this point in the discussion may be that these students enroll mostly in 2-year institutions such as community colleges or technical schools. Apparently, however, the idea that it takes good academic credentials to get into a 4-year college is old-fashioned.

In general, the data support the *one way to win* paradigm: The only way to win is a 4-year college degree; 78% of all graduates were in 4-year colleges. What is startling, however, is that almost half (47%) of the students who graduated with academically noncompetitive credentials were also in 4-year colleges (see Figure 4.2). Of those in 2-year institutions, we can only be somewhat certain that the 15% in business and technical schools were not taking general studies courses in the hope of transferring to a 4-year degree program.

Findings from the research described above can put the persuasiveness of the *one way to win* paradigm and the resulting press to go to college into real terms by looking at its effect on a group of actual graduates. Consistent with national data, most had elected to take the college prep courses; only 7% were in vocational education. One third in these elite high schools had graduated with advanced academic credentials that would support a decision to pursue a baccalaureate degree. Another group had questionable credentials, suggesting that college would be an academic stretch, at least in the

beginning. Importantly, even though the remaining 46% had credentials that suggested inadequate preparation for college-level work, 56% of this group went on to college; of this group, almost half attended 4-year colleges. Of course, the question is this: How did they do in higher education?

Also, we should not forget the students who went to work without preparation. How did these students do? We examine these questions in Chapter 5. But before turning to the postsecondary experiences of those in the academic middle, a closer look at the high school experiences of those who graduated with academically noncompetitive credentials is worthwhile. After all, these are the students most likely to be hurt by the presence of only *one way to win*.

SECTION II

The High School Experience of Those in the Academic Middle

College Prep Course-Taking Patterns

How many math and science courses were taken by the academically average students in this study? As part of the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study, data regarding levels of math, science, and foreign language course taking were collected from each student's transcript. After these patterns were summarized for just those who failed to earn either competitive or semicompetitive high school credentials, we found that the overall levels of math, science, and foreign languages taken by the remaining 46% we have called academically noncompetitive were quite high. Only 19% of these students failed to complete Algebra I; 50% took math through Algebra II. In addition, 38% took 2 years of college prep science; 47% took 2 or more years of the same foreign language. Thus, one positive development of increasing percentages of all students in the college prep program is that, at least in these high schools, they did take higher levels of math and science than they would have if they were in vocational education (for details regarding course-taking patterns for vocational education students, see U.S. Department of Education, 1994, pp. 112-113).

Yet, something seems odd, doesn't it? If these students had this much math and science, why did they do so poorly on the SAT? The

data suggest to us that although these students were enrolled in higher levels of math and science courses, they were somewhat untouched by the experience. Stated in another way, traditional college prep courses would seem to be less effective for those in the academic middle. Unlike their more academically blessed peers, those in the academic middle may take a course but not master the content. This conclusion is substantiated by the low grades obtained by this group in these courses and by the fact that (as is reported in Chapter 5) half of those who graduated with academically noncompetitive credentials and went on to college had to take one or more remedial courses in higher education.

The point is that simply driving these students higher in the traditional curriculum—an oft-expressed goal among educational reformers—may not do much to improve their skills. Those who take solace in the fact that more academically average students are now in college prep courses are perhaps celebrating prematurely; students may be in the courses, but they may not be learning much. In fact, they often seem to be almost unaffected by the experience. This statement brings us to another important variable: the general degree of involvement of these students in high school curriculum.

Involvement in the Curriculum

As researchers probe the results of the steady increase in the number of students who actually prevail to graduate from high school, it becomes increasingly apparent that completing high school and actually learning something are two entirely different things. This reality suggests that the goal is not only to keep young people in school or even in class but also to engage them as a prerequisite to learning (Anderson, 1983). Thus, those seeking to improve the instructional effectiveness of schools are increasingly focusing on students' degree of involvement or attachment to the curriculum.

In the light of the growing body of literature suggesting the relationship between educational effectiveness and involvement—which is common sense because it is tough to learn by not paying attention—the researchers involved in the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study employed statistical techniques to test the degree to which students were involved in the curriculum. They did this by testing the degree to which traditional variables, such as attendance, satisfaction with high school, and working part-time, affected students'

grades. The rationale was that if the students were not very involved with learning in school, it would make little difference whether they were absent, liked school, or worked part-time. In fact, when compared with their more academically successful peers, the grades of those who graduated with academically noncompetitive credentials were relatively unaffected by the variables tested. Although absences, dislike of school, and working part-time all negatively affected the grades of those graduating with competitive or semicompetitive credentials, only absences affected the grades of noncompetitive students. Even then, the magnitude of the effect on grades of not coming to school was considerably less for these students than for the rest (Gray et al., 1993).

A pattern thus emerges. A large group of high school students, in this case 46% of all graduates, take rather high levels of college prep courses, but their participation is passive, at best. They might as well take high school correspondence courses. These students are playing the *one way to win* game without much enthusiasm. In fact, when asked, they agreed: 75% of those in the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study who graduated with academically noncompetitive credentials said they wished "they had worked harder while in high school."

Career Uncertainty

Passivity and lack of engagement by academically average students may be partially explained by the fact that, compared with their more academically successful peers, they are less certain about why they took college prep courses in the first place. Indicative of this situation is the degree to which those with noncompetitive credentials were significantly more likely to express feelings of career uncertainty. For example, these students were twice as likely to volunteer on the follow-up survey that they wished they had "thought more about their future" while in high school. Likewise, a majority (60%) of all respondents wished that the high school had provided opportunities to explore careers. In fact, a much higher percentage (80%) of those graduating with academically noncompetitive credentials thought this way; this finding suggests a higher level of both career uncertainty and anxiety.

Thus, although we cannot say with certainty that career immaturity or uncertainty was a factor in their lack of academic success, it may be something less than a coincidence that the more successful

the students were in the college prep program, the less likely they were to express a need for opportunities to explore careers. One wonders, then, about these students' level of commitment to preparing for college, in the light of their relative uncertainty about their future. This speculation adds weight to the argument that many pursue college prep because they have been provided with only *one way to win*. It would seem that if they needed guidance, they did not get it in high school. In fact, in high school they were largely asked to take a back seat.

Second-Class Status

If the academically average seem largely uninvolved, it is because they are treated this way within the social framework of the U.S. high school. Basically, they are largely ignored and treated as second-class citizens.

In the true Taylorist tradition, high school educators appear to be preparing the academically less blessed for future roles as quiescent, anonymous subordinates. As is pointed out in *The Shopping Mall High School* (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985), these students are relegated to the role of "spectator." They are asked or ordered to sit passively during awards assemblies while their more blessed peers receive all the awards. They are expected to show "school spirit" by filling the stands at pep rallies for more honored student athletes. Even the uniqueness that should fall on those in the academic middle because of enrollment in revered college prep courses does not occur: Today, virtually everyone is enrolled in this curriculum. The awards are reserved now only for those enrolled in honors or advanced placement college prep courses. This Taylorist modus operandi is not lost on students, particularly those relegated to second-class status. As part of the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study, graduates were asked whether they thought "some students were treated better than others"; 78% of all graduates and 84% of those graduating with noncompetitive credentials responded affirmatively.

How is it possible for nearly half of the teens in any high school to be lost, even when they are in a college prep program of study? Some researchers suggest a masked bias by teachers in favor of the more academically talented. Evidence suggests that teachers do describe and treat the blessed in significantly more positive terms than the less blessed (Oakes, 1985). Yet, in most cases, the situation is

probably due more to benign neglect than to covert plots or sinister prejudices. Perhaps there are simply too many teens and too few teachers. Regardless, few would debate that when it comes to academic performance, the standards for those in the academic middle are lower; there is little demand for excellence, and the teens know it.

Low Academic Expectations

As part of the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study, graduates were asked whether they "wished they had worked harder in high school." Seventy-five percent of graduating noncompetitive students said they wished they had. Equally important, they apparently were not asked to. When asked whether they "felt pressure to get good grades," fewer than half of this group said yes. Even in college prep courses, these students are not held to the same standards as the academically gifted cohort sequestered in honors and AP courses. Homework is a good example.

Although the academically less blessed may not be able to achieve at the same level as the blessed, they should be expected to invest equal amounts of time in trying. One indicator of institutional expectation of effort is whether or not homework is regularly required. Any number of studies have documented the lower amount of homework expected of less academically blessed students, if any at all (see Bottoms, Pressons, & Johnson, 1992). Some researchers have gone so far as to suggest that an unwritten deal has been struck between those who make up the academic middle and their teachers. The authors of *The Shopping Mall High School* (Powell et al., 1985) call these agreements "classroom treaties," whereby unmotivated students agree not to hassle the teachers and, in turn, the teachers agree not to hassle them. Thus, much less is required of these students than would be required of more academically able students.

Sedlak (1986) argues that the lack of rigorous academic standards for those in the academic middle, together with the classroom standoff between teachers and those from the academic middle who now enroll in college prep courses, represents a logical adjustment to contradictory social expectations. Specifically, in the face of unrealistic expectations of universal attendance and now universal success in preparing all students for college, high schools simply have adjusted. The academically gifted, those who are blessed with the cognitive skills to succeed in the *one way to win* game, are placed in honors courses and

provided with a demanding and rigorous program. The rest, if they choose, are allowed to enroll in college prep courses, but the daily routine and standards within these courses are quite different from those populated by the academically blessed. Honors courses are challenging and competitive, whereas courses for the less blessed are passive, generally unchallenging, and noncompetitive. Debate and cooperative or group learning are common in advanced college prep classes, whereas lectures and predictable routine dominate classes for the average student in the college prep program. When discussion does occur in the regular college prep classes, it is often at the concrete recitation level, whereas in advanced courses, students are challenged to interpret and extrapolate. At both levels, some homework is required, but the complexity and level of thinking required in honors courses is more advanced (Powell et al., 1985). In advanced college prep classes, both the academic content and teacher expectations are what would be expected of those preparing for serious college work. The same cannot be said of regular courses populated by academically average students. This finding explains why many of those who graduate having taken college prep courses still are not prepared to do college work.

Other Ways to Win

In this chapter, the academic credentials of high school graduates were examined to determine the degree of readiness to pursue the most popular path after graduation—namely, a 4-year college degree. Of particular interest was whether high school students were graduating with the advanced academic credentials needed to predict academic success in college. A study of high school graduates from seven elite public high schools where virtually all were supposedly preparing for college revealed that only 30% earned the academically advanced credentials normally associated with admissions and success at Level 1 colleges, those that are still selective and rigorous. Another 24% graduated with credentials that might predict readiness to do higher education academic work at Level 2 institutions, those that accept virtually everyone. The remaining 46% graduated with credentials that suggested inadequate preparation for higher education.

Of particular importance to those seeking to create *other ways to win* is evidence that simply enrolling these students in traditional college prep high school courses is not instructionally effective. Although students may take the courses, they do not necessarily master the content. Furthermore, this group is largely unengaged in the high school curriculum in general, perhaps because they are largely ignored or unchallenged by high school teachers. These students report not being pressed to do well in high school and wishing they had worked harder. They also wished they had thought more about their future and had been given more opportunities to explore careers while in high school. This information suggests that, compared with their more academically successful peers, they lack career maturity. The point is that if educators are to create legitimate *other ways to win*, it will be necessary to devise not just postsecondary alternatives but also focused, rigorous academics that prepare students to succeed by providing well-planned and focused career exploration. Evidence suggests that this creation calls for higher expectations and new instructional approaches, all of which are explored in detail in Part 3.

Data reviewed in this chapter demonstrate the unavoidable conclusion that, even in elite public high schools, only about half of graduating students are even minimally prepared to do college-level work. One can assume that, in lesser high schools, the percentage will be lower. Yet, like their counterparts across the U.S., faced with only one way to win, the majority of students went on to higher education anyway, mostly to 4-year colleges or to 2-year general studies transfer programs. Clearly, this decision by those with noncompetitive academic credentials would seem unrealistic and thus very risky. These students would seem to require better alternatives or *other ways to win*. Of course, the validity of this argument necessitates evidence, such as data about the level of success experienced by academically average students in higher education. This topic is the focus of Chapter 5.

Note

1. Mark Pitsch, 1994, p. 7. Copyright © 1994, *Education Week*; reprinted by permission.

5

Winners and Losers in the *One Way to Win* Game

College is the sort of place that says to anybody who's over 18, and breathing, come here, and bring your tuition.

A. Shanker (1994, p. 4)[1]

Academe is "healthy and expanding." As enthusiastically reported by Carnegie Foundation President Ernest Boyer, "There is more higher education [in the United States]—than ever before in history. Predictions about decline are not supported by the trends" (Evangelauf, 1994, p. 17). We hope the reader is a little more inclined toward pessimism at this point.

In the case of higher education enrollment, more may not necessarily be better. Enthusiasm for continued expansion of higher education requires some evidence that those fueling this growth by lining up to pay tuition bills in record numbers are adequately prepared and sufficiently mature to benefit from the experience. These same people want evidence that the labor market will provide an adequate amount of commensurate employment because this is the reason for lining up in the first place. If increases in higher education enrollments are simply resulting in more students entering college unprepared, having to take remedial courses, and flunking out after accumulating significant student loan debt, or if greater

percentages of those who graduate end up underemployed, then the development would have to be viewed differently.

These concerns are the focus of this chapter. We begin by looking at national data on the academic readiness of high school graduates who enter college. Then we return to the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study discussed in Chapter 4 to look at the first-year higher education experiences of those from the academic middle who graduated with noncompetitive high school credentials. Of particular interest is the number who actually had to take remedial courses that do not count toward a degree. We then examine national data on graduation rates in higher education and the projections for labor market opportunities for those who persist and graduate. Finally, we again return to the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study data to determine what happens to those high school graduates who prepare for college but go to work instead. The main purpose of this chapter is to answer one important question: Among those who pursue the *one way to win* paradigm, who wins and who loses?

SECTION I

College Dropouts: The First Losers

Evidence shows that reacting to the conventional wisdom of *one way to win*—the belief that the only route, at least the only socially acceptable route, to the American dream—involves getting at least a baccalaureate degree in the hope that it will lead to a job in the professional ranks. The majority of today's high school students are taking college prep courses. Aided by open admissions at the majority of higher education institutions, most do enroll in 4-year colleges or 2-year programs that hold a promise of leading to a 4-year degree. This is true despite the fact that many young people graduate from high school with academic credentials demonstrating a lack of preparation for college-level work. Is the unprecedented growth in higher education enrollment, particularly in programs leading to a 4-year degree, a positive development? And is this a wise investment of both individual and public funds? The answers would seem to depend partially on the degree to which a reasonable number of those who enroll are academically prepared and graduate.

Academic Ability to Benefit

Certainly one test of the wisdom of *one way to win* for all, and, conversely, of the need to create other economically legitimate and socially acceptable alternatives to pursuing a 4-year degree is how well freshmen, particularly those from the academic middle, perform in college. Our review of the effectiveness of the high school college prep programs of study gives us reason to expect that many who head off to college are not ready to do college-level work. College faculty, when polled, agree: Only 20% of faculty at baccalaureate institutions agreed that incoming freshmen were adequately prepared in "written and oral communication skills." Only 15% felt the same way about undergraduate preparation in math ("International Survey," 1994). Yet perhaps the best evidence of the academic deficiency of many entering freshmen at all types of higher education institutions is the number who must take remedial courses during their freshman year.

Remedial Courses

One of the best-kept secrets in higher education—kept from the public who pays much of the bill and from parents who are often shocked to find that their child with a B average in high school is taking remedial reading—is that a substantial amount of the course work taken by entering college freshmen does not count toward a degree. Instead, these students are enrolled in remedial—sometime called developmental—courses designed to prepare those already admitted to do college-level work. In what certainly appears to be irrational, if not unethical, behavior, administrations at most institutions of higher education are admitting students who they themselves believe are inadequately prepared for college-level work. In the 1993-1994 school year, 90% of all 4-year colleges/universities and 95% of all public 4-year colleges/universities scheduled remedial courses (American Council on Education, 1994a). The point here is not to debate the merit of this practice, especially because the higher education community has a well-honed egalitarian rationale (see Clark, 1962). Instead, the intent is to suggest that the dramatic growth in remediation occurring in U.S. colleges and universities is proof that growing percentages of college students are unprepared to do

college-level academic work. They are more likely not to graduate and thus are more likely to default on student loans and to be among the losers of the *one way to win* game. So, for our purposes in considering the need to create *other ways to win*, the question of the percentage of entering freshmen actually required to take these remedial courses is of interest.

How many of those who graduate from high school and enter higher education take remedial courses? Suspiciously, the number of such students is difficult to ascertain. Baccalaureate-granting institutions are very willing to indicate the existence of such courses on their campuses but are less likely to voluntarily provide data about the number enrolled in them. When asked, about one third of entering freshmen indicate that they expect to take remedial course work (American Council on Education, 1994a). The true number is probably a lot higher. For example, one institution that will provide data (to its credit) is the Pennsylvania State University Commonwealth Campus System. In 1990, 44% of entering freshmen exhibited a need for remedial courses. This figure, however, is an average of the 19 campuses in the system: Some campuses had remedial rates in the 69% to 70% range. No, these are not special-admit students with learning disabilities taking occupational programs. To begin with, 94% of all students enrolled at these campuses are in programs designed to transfer to a baccalaureate degree program at the main campus. To paraphrase the Pennsylvania State University report (1991),

> One common misconception about students with basic skills needs is that they are admitted in special categories. In fact, less than one percent had identified learning disabilities, 70% were admitted as regular admits, and as a group, those with basic skills needs had high school GPA's of 2.0 to 3.49. (Appendix F)

The Pennsylvania State University Commonwealth Campus System is not unique. The situation is the same in every state. It is not unusual to have 80% or more of entering freshmen taking one or more remedial courses. If you don't think so, check it out in your state. But, to further examine the remedial course-taking phenomenon, let's return to the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study (Gray et al.,

TABLE 5.1 Higher Education Freshmen: Remedial Courses and Sophomore Status, Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study

	Remedial English	*Remedial Math*	*Any Remedial*	*Achieved Sophomore Status*
Noncompetitive Academic Credentials	26%	31%	46%	52%
Semicompetitive	22%	5%	27%	66%

SOURCE: From *The Class of 1991: One Year Later*, by K. Gray, S. Malizia, and D. Wang, 1993. Unpublished research report.

1993). How many of these graduates had to take remedial courses during their first year of college?

Respondents in the study were asked several questions to assess their success in their freshman year in college. The first question sought to determine how many had to take remedial courses and in what academic areas. A summary of the results is presented in Table 5.1. One fifth of all students in the study who were in higher education had to take one or more remedial courses, a finding that seems fairly positive. But, when one looks at the three academic groups separately, a different, not so rosy picture, emerges. One fourth (27%) of the semicompetitive group and half (46%) of the noncompetitive group were judged by the institutions that admitted them as needing remediation. The most common need was in the area of English, although the noncompetitive students were even less proficient in math; this finding is surprising because more than half had taken math through Algebra II.

So what is the point? Our intent is not to point the finger at high schools for poor preparation. In all fairness, high schools well prepare those blessed with the academic ability to do legitimate college-level work. Although we could fault the colleges for admitting ill-prepared students, college administrators would argue that they are providing equal opportunity through open admissions. Instead, then, our intention is to suggest that if these large numbers of students are not prepared to do baccalaureate degree academic work, then maybe, just maybe, they should be doing something else. And if, given some legitimate socially valued alternatives that make eco-

nomic sense, perhaps many of these students *would* do something else. Without other choices, what happens to those who start college having to take remedial courses? Many fail. As Burton Clark (1962) argued: "The initial move in a cooling out process is pre-entrance testing: low scores lead poorly qualified students into remedial classes . . . which slows the students moving into bona fide courses . . . and cast doubt (regarding ever graduating)" (pp. 569-577).

Although in Clark's time, remedial courses were confined to 2-year junior colleges, today they exist virtually everywhere in higher education. Their effect, however, has not changed over time. Enrollment in remedial courses is the first sign of trouble in the *one way to win* game. The second sign is the number returning home after completion of the freshman year who have not earned a sufficient number of credits to be classified as sophomores.

Sophomore Status

In the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study, one third (34%) of those who graduated with semicompetitive academic credentials and one half (48%) of those with noncompetitive academic credentials did not earn sophomore status (see Table 5.1) by August of 1992. Thus, aside from those who graduated with academically competitive credentials, a large percentage of the rest were behind after only 1 year. The chances of their winning the *one way to win* game based on their academic record was fair to poor to begin with. The results after 1 year bear out this prediction. For many of these students, "dropping out" or "cooling out" is just a matter of time.

College Dropouts

Arguably, the first to lose when there is only *one way to win* are those adolescents who decide early that college is out of their reach. These students give up, drop out, or tune out. Among those who actually go on to college, the first losers are those who enter college unprepared, are required to take remedial courses, and fall behind; they ultimately drop out, in some cases, after accumulating a significant student loan debt. Exactly what percentage of college attendees

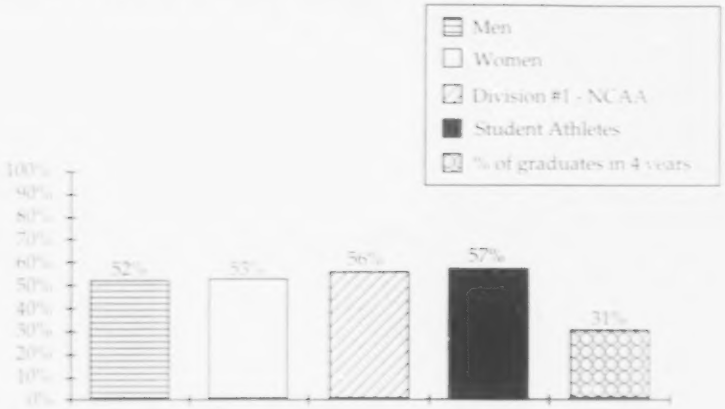


Figure 5.1. College Completion Rates

SOURCES: From American Council on Education, 1994b, *Twelfth Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education*, Washington, DC: Author; National College Athletic Association, (1994, July 7). *InterCom*, p. 5, University Park: Pennsylvania State University; OERI, 1994, *Condition of Education 1993* (pp. 93-290), Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

are we talking about? Specifically, how many graduate within 4 years or within the time frame of a majority of baccalaureate degree programs? Only 30%.

Of course, a variety of reasons, such as poor precollege preparation, remedial courses, working part-time, changing academic majors, and inability to get required courses, have delayed students' graduation. Of those who do graduate from public colleges and universities, the average time for completion in many instances is more than 5 years. In fact, in 1990, only 31% of all baccalaureate degree candidates completed their degrees within 4 years of graduation from high school (OERI, 1994). Our interest here is in determining how many do not graduate at all, because among those who play the *one way to lose* game, these are the first round of losers. According to the American Council on Education (1994b), 53% graduate. Women are slightly more likely than men to win (see Figure 5.1); Asians are more likely than whites to win, and whites are more likely than people of color to win. This finding is rather sobering. We have given youth only *one way to win*, but just about half lose in the first round by failing to get a BA degree. This information is also rather costly,

considering that at least three fourths of this group will have borrowed money or been given public money to attend college.

Of course, students drop out of college for a variety of reasons. Some of these would exist even if there were other ways to win. Of interest here are the variables that cause students to drop out and that can be influenced in high school. One way to focus on these variables is to examine students who drop out during their freshman year, because, arguably, these are the ones whose failure is most related to their high school preparation.

Many parents of college freshmen spend that first year in various stages of apprehension, waiting for the dreaded call from college. They sense, without being told, another one of higher education's well-guarded secrets: Basically, one third of all college freshmen drop out during their freshman year (Levitz & Noel, 1985). Many drop out before they even really begin. If the number of all freshman dropouts is subtracted from the number who leave between semesters, half of the rest drop out during the first 6 weeks. It is a mistake to think that these students simply flunk out. In fact, some data suggest that the first-year dropout rates for college freshmen are just as high for academically able students as for marginal students. The huge number of entering freshmen who fail to return the next year suggests that many youth are making what they later decide was a very bad decision. They do not necessarily fail; that can take a couple of years. Instead, they drift away. They played the college game and made everyone happy, but high school graduation is over and the pressures are not as intense; they throw in the towel and leave school, but not without costs. According to the General Accounting Office (GAO, 1991), an important predictor of those who will default on student loan debts is whether they failed to complete their first year. Thus, for at least one third of all college freshmen, going to college proves, in the first year, to be a very expensive mistake. Furthermore, only about one third of all who matriculate graduate in 4 years, and only about one half ever graduate at all. One wonders how many of these, even among those who are academically gifted, did not really want to go in the first place and would have made other choices if they had had *other ways to win.*

Of course, about half of those who start a 4-year college degree do graduate. If they are white or Asian, about 6 of 10 graduate; if they are persons of color, about 3 of 10 graduate. So here it is time to deliver the final wake-up call to those promoting attendance at a 4-year

college. The bad news is that at least one third of those who do graduate from college will end up underemployed.

SECTION II

Underemployed College Graduates: The Second Losers

National survey data (see Table 1.2) of both high school graduates and entering college freshmen show that the principal reason for going to college is to get a better job. In fact, economic uncertainty regarding future employment opportunities and the conclusion that only a 4-year college degree offers any future opportunity are largely responsible for the growth in college enrollments since the early 1980s. Overwhelmingly, high school graduates place their hopes for a secure economic future in one set of occupations, the professions: 49.3% percent of men and 68.8% of women graduating high school seniors in 1992 expected to be employed in the professions (see Table 1.4). No other occupational choice was even close. Only 6.7% were inspired either to own their own businesses or to be managers or technicians (6%). Only 2.8% expected to enter the well-paying skilled trades. For all practical purposes, everyone has the same career plan, and its folly is obvious. Major league baseball players make lots of money, but (a) not everyone has the talent to be one and (b) even if everyone did, there are only so many jobs in the big leagues to go around. The same is true for professional work.

The public in general and students and parents in particular seem to have faith that if one earns a 4-year degree that includes a professional credential, such as a teaching certificate or a law degree, a job will be waiting. The assumption is that the demand for professionals will increase to accommodate the rising percentage of the population who hold these credentials. By the early 1990s, signs indicated that this faith was not well placed. For example, by the early 1990s, the popular press was carrying cover stories such as that in *U.S. News and World Report* (October 4, 1993, p. 96), which asked rhetorically, "Does College Still Pay?" The author of this article went on to argue that the "economic argument for college is not as compelling as it once was; the problem: too many graduates, too few jobs, and declining relative wages" (Elfin, 1993, p. 96).

Parents of high school graduates who plan to attend college, along with all others who pay the bills, should be forewarned. U.S. Department of Labor projections (Eck, 1993) indicate that although the nation's colleges and universities will graduate 1.2 million with baccalaureate degrees each June through the year 2005, the economy will generate only about 850,000 jobs that require this level of education. Milton Stern (1992), a former dean at the University of California at Berkeley, warns of the coming social challenges of accommodating the "well-educated poor." These people hold degrees but no jobs, or hold jobs they could have gotten without a BA degree. One of every three who finishes a baccalaureate degree program—which is about half who start one—will end up underemployed. There is no way to know for certain, but it is very likely that those from the academic middle who went to college without adequate preparation but persisted and graduated anyway have the highest probability of being among this growing class of underemployed.

The Labor Market Outlook for College Graduates

The mismatch between projected demand and supply of credentialed college graduates becomes even more dramatic when one looks at data for selected occupations. Table 5.2 provides the projected average annual job openings for occupational groups, the number of education and training credentials awarded annually, and resultant net demand or surplus of candidates. Notice immediately the projected net demand in professional occupations. Most high school graduates who go to college say they expect to work in the professional ranks, but there clearly are not enough jobs to go around. For example, the economy is expected to generate 623,000 jobs in the professional specialty category, but it is also projected that the higher education system will award more than 1.1 million professional undergraduate and graduate degrees. Considering that these supply figures do not include other sources of employees for these professional jobs, such as professionals trained abroad, it is clear that, at best, only 1 of 2 who prepare for the specialized professional ranks will find commensurate employment.

The sobering bottom line for 49.3% of all male and 68.8% of all female high school graduates with ambitions to enter the professions

TABLE 5.2 Projected Average Annual Job Openings: 1990-2005

	Openings	*Number of Credentials Awarded*	*Net Openings*
Professional Managerial			
Executive, Administration	436,000	506,830	−70,830
Construction Managers	7,000	825	+6,175
Marketing, Advertising, and Public Relations Managers	23,000	66,416	−43,416
Professional Specialty	623,000	1,120,063	−497,063
Physical Scientists	8,000	35,163	−27,163
Lawyers	28,006	44,314	−16,308
Technical			
Technicians	183,000	212,767	−29,767
Health	79,000	71,804	+7,196
Engineering	52,000	85,611	−33,611
Blue-Collar Technical			
Craft, Precision Metal, and Specialized Repair	455,000	133,057	+321,943
Mechanics, Installers, Repairers	160,000	91,758	+68,242
Service Occupation	882,000	237,062	+644,938
Operators, Laborers	477,000	41,504	+435,496
Farming, Forestry, Fishing	90,000	14,547	+75,453

SOURCE: Data compiled from "Job-Related Education and Training: Their Impact on Earnings," by A. Eck, 1993, *Monthly Labor Review*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.

(Table 1.4) is that, at best, even among those who actually graduate from college, there will be twice as many individuals graduating with professional credentials than there will be jobs available. In fact, the data reveal many widespread misconceptions about the need for certain types of professionals. Although the oversupply of lawyers is widely known, the popular belief is that there is a national shortage of scientists, engineers, and related workers. This is a misconception (see Table 5.2). Even in the hard sciences, the supply of graduates

greatly exceeds the demand, a fact that leads some, such as Rustum Roy (1992), world-renowned solid state scientist, to argue that the shortage of people in the sciences is just a myth created by the National Science Foundation to obtain greater funding from Congress. In fact, the only major professional occupations in which demand will greatly exceed supply are physicians and dentists (Eck, 1993).

The bad news is not confined to the professions. When looking at other occupational groups normally associated with 4-year college-level preparation, similar oversupplies may be found. An example is professional managerial occupations. In this category, the gap between opportunities and credentialed job seekers is smaller, but demand will still exceed supply (see Table 5.2). A close look at the managerial occupational group, however, reveals some interesting exceptions that hint at *other ways to win*. For example, there is an oversupply of people preparing to be marketing, advertising, and public relations managers—popular majors at 4-year colleges. Conversely, the demand for indivduals with the skills necessary to manage construction projects, which are very well paid positions, greatly exceeds the supply. These positions do not require a 4-year college degree. They may not be as glamorous, but they are both high paying and offer good opportunities for advancement, a fact discussed in Chapter 7.

SECTION III

More Losers? Those Who Prepare for College but Go to Work Instead

One other group of high school graduates is often overlooked. Although only 7% of all students in the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study (Gray et al., 1993) had taken a comprehensive vocational education program in high school, 14% were employed full-time. Another 6% were employed part-time. In other words, more than half of those who went to work did so without availing themselves of vocational education programs in high school. Could this be yet another group of losers in the *one way to win* game? Perhaps, but perhaps not. Some researchers have argued, for example, that high

school students do not need courses that teach job skills because employers will provide on-the-job training. In this case, the college prep program would serve equally well those who go directly to work and those who go to college. Think again!

The percentage of all high school graduates who go to work full-time immediately after graduation has fallen steadily since the early 1980s; today, this percentage is much more like 18% than the 50% frequently implied in the press. Until recently, this group, unless enrolled in a comprehensive vocational education program, represented the truly forgotten or ignored. In the early 1990s, however, the plight of this group became the focus of the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education. This interest culminated in the School to Work Opportunity Act (SWOA) of 1994, an act designed to put into place a better system of transition from high school to the workplace.

Unfortunately, the success of the SWOA is doubtful without the commensurate creation of legitimate alternatives to the *one way to win* conventional wisdom. Why? Because in reality, most high school students do not want to go to work after high school. Going to work is not compatible with the *one way to win* mentality. In fact, it is somewhat ironic to observe that the billions of dollars invested by the federal government in higher education will likely ensure that the money it invests in the SWOA will be wasted. Although some do go to work after graduation, most who do so have spent their high school years taking, with admittedly varying levels of success, college prep courses, as evidenced by the steady decline in vocational education enrollments. How, then, do these graduates who took college prep courses instead of vocational education do in the labor force? This question becomes important when determining the need to create *other ways to win*. To probe this issue, we return to the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study.

Dead-End Jobs for Those Without Vocational Education

Researchers conducting the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study (Gray et al., 1993) were particularly interested in the postsecondary experiences of graduates who did not take vocational education but went to work full-time. Indicative of the persuasiveness of the *one way to*

win press, 60% of this group had taken the SAT. This group contained a small percentage of very academically able students. The majority (82%), however, graduated with academically noncompetitive credentials. Those who went to work but had not been enrolled in vocational education course work were the most marginal of college prep students. How did they do? Not well. Their average yearly income was $15,438, which would be poverty level for a family of four. Of course, many were earning even less: One third were making between $8,000 and $15,000. The majority were working in services and transportation industries, followed by food service or retailing and manufacturing.

Importantly, the experiences of this group, particularly those who graduated with academically noncompetitive credentials, were significantly poorer than the experiences of those who took vocational education. Those completing vocational education programs of study were less apt to be unemployed and earned higher salaries. No doubt, the latter resulted from the fact that vocational education graduates were more likely to be employed in work that required some prior skills. Vocational education graduates, for example, were more likely to have found employment in the skilled trades, health occupations, and food industries (not to be confused with fast-food service jobs).

Almost all of the class of 1991 graduates in the labor force worked in small firms: 37% in firms with fewer than 19 employees, 78% in firms with fewer than 500 employees. This finding is important because of the often-heard argument that high school students do not need courses that teach job skills because employers will provide on-the-job training. Small firms cannot afford to provide on-the-job training and are the least likely to do so (Carnevale, Gainer, & Villet, 1990). Thus, it was not surprising to find that only 22% of those in the labor force reported receiving formal training. The importance of training and its relationship to work that pays a living wage were illustrated by the data; those who reported having been trained by their employer were earning on the average of $19,646 a year, versus $10,000 for those who had not. Confirming other studies (Gray & Wang, 1989), the data suggest that those who think high school graduates will be trained by employers are largely mistaken and that those who need training the most are least likely to get it unless it is in high school.

The Influence of Working Part-Time in High School

One additional interesting finding should be mentioned. Those responding to the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Survey (Gray et al., 1993) were asked whether they had worked part-time during their senior year in high school. Consistent with national data, 63% reported working part-time. This percentage is slightly less than the national average, where 75% of college freshmen report working part-time during their senior year of high school. By using multivariate analysis (Wang, 1993), it was found that working part-time did not affect grades unless the hours worked exceeded 20 hours per week. The more important finding, for our purposes, was that the average salaries of those in the labor force who had worked part-time during their senior year were almost $3,000 higher than for those who did not. This significant finding suggests the importance of work experience for those who go to work and the importance of work-site learning and part-time work experience for those designing *other ways to win*. It is also worth noting that both of these activities are centerpieces of the School to Work Opportunity Act.

In summary, what can be said about those who take the traditional college prep program of study but go to work? Do they win or lose as a result of preparing for the *one way to win* game instead of for full-time employment? Compared with those who take vocational education, they primarily lose. In general, they end up in unskilled jobs in small firms, mostly in the service industries. They receive no formal training and earn only minimum wage. As a group, they are more likely to be unemployed, and, if they are employed, they are more likely to earn less than the 7% of students who took a comprehensive vocational education program. For those seeking to create *other ways to win*, it is important, therefore, to note that the most "at risk" among those who went to work are those from the academic middle who graduated without any work experiences.

Other Ways to Win

In this chapter, data from the postsecondary experiences of recent high school graduates were studied to evaluate the merits of the

one way to win philosophy. The data suggest the wisdom of questioning the *one way to win* paradigm among both those who head off to 4-year colleges and those who, without adequate preparation, go to work. The losers outnumber the winners.

For example, the data reveal that, of those who begin a BA degree, only slightly more than half of whites and Asians and fewer than half of other people of color graduate. Furthermore, of the group that does graduate, one third will still lose because the economy will provide little college-level work. When one looks just at those who aspire to the professions, the majority of whom are women, the odds of winning are even worse. Of those preparing for the professions—accountants, chemists, elementary school teachers, engineers, and so forth—only 1 of 2 will find work.

Who will be the winners? Common sense and good research suggest the winners can be identified in high school. The winners will be those who graduate with academically competitive credentials that enable them to go to better colleges; these credentials will, in turn, give them advantages in the labor market when competing for a limited number of professional and other 4-year college-level jobs.

Who will be the losers? The losers likely will be among those who graduated from the academic middle—those who were pressed into attending 4-year colleges even though they lacked adequate academic preparation or the ability to succeed. The losers also will include those who, for whatever reason, prepared in high school to go to college but went to work instead. Thus, it is difficult not to conclude that losers outnumber winners in the *one way to win* game.

We make one final point. If so many young people in the academic middle are being hurt at great cost to themselves, to their parents, and even to the United States as a whole by the *one way to win* paradigm, and if those who need help the most are hurt the most, then why isn't action being taken? The answer lies in the politics of the academically average in U.S. high schools, which is the topic of Chapter 6.

Note

1. Mark Pitsch, 1994, p. 4. Copyright © 1994, *Education Week*; reprinted by permission.

6

Who Cares?

The Politics of Average Students

A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.

William James (1842-1910)

In terms of achieving their expressed postsecondary education and career goals, more than 50% of all high school graduates fail. Nationwide, 85% of high school graduates want to obtain a 4-year college degree, but only 30% graduate with the academically advanced credentials to indicate adequate preparation for legitimate college-level academic work. The vast majority (70%) of high school graduates go on to college, most to 4-year colleges, despite inadequate academic preparation. Thus, it is not surprising to find that 50% or more have to take remedial courses sometime during their freshman year in college. Six years later, only about 50% actually graduate with a 4-year degree. The rest of the students "cool out" of the higher education system, but not before most have accumulated significant financial aid debt.

Meanwhile, the employment prospects for those who do persist and obtain a 4-year degree worsen. Whereas in the past, one in every five persons with college degrees failed to find commensurate

employment, today, it is one in three and rising. In the professions, such as accounting and teaching, at best only one in two will find a job.

Not a very bright picture, is it? Of those who begin a 4-year degree, only about one third are adequately prepared; only one half graduate; and of those who do graduate, only two in three at best will get a college-level job. Yet no one seems to be concerned. Parents don't complain. Educators—both secondary and postsecondary—are largely silent. Politicians continue to make even grander promises of financial help and tax breaks. Others take financial advantage of the situation. It is the strange politics of *one way to win* or the "must go to college" mentality. More specifically, it is the strange politics of "average students," the most common victims of providing only *one way to win*.

SECTION I

High School Politics and the Academically Average

It is important to understand that average students—those who make up the academic middle, those hurt most by *one way to win*—have no advocates either locally or nationally. The Washington, D.C., advocacy (a fancy name for lobbyist) scene is a good illustration. At least 30 groups promote themselves as advocates for children with special needs. There are lobbyists for college students, for Ivy League colleges, for land-grant universities, and for unemployed engineers, to name a few. But as far as we know, there is no advocacy group for academically average students.

Whereas the academically blessed have many advocates—for example, their parents who serve on public school boards, high school teachers who love to teach advanced placement and honors courses, and school administrators who see admissions at prestigious colleges as the zenith of educational effectiveness—average teens have no one. Whereas special needs students have an army of advocates and laws to safeguard their rights, average students have neither—a situation that led the authors of *The Shopping Mall High School* (Powell et al., 1985) to label them the "unspecial."

In reporting the results of an ethnographic case study of several high schools, Powell et al. were struck by the invisibility of average students; in fact, they were so invisible that high school educators had difficulty describing them:

> Indeed, one important characteristic is the very absence of precision (in high school teachers' minds) about exactly who they (the unspecial) are. They were variously the "invisible people," "the middle of the class," and "that great gray-mass area," those who don't belong anywhere, the people who don't fit into any . . . categories. (Powell et al., 1985, p. 174)

Powell et al. go on to confirm the argument made here: The unspecial are the majority:

> Words like *average, middle, normal,* and *regular* were often used to describe quite different kinds of adolescents. Some enrolled in college-preparatory programs but were not in advanced or honors courses and therefore were no longer special because post-secondary education was a mass expectation. Others saw the unspecial as a contemporary version of traditional "general" students—shaped neither by clear college expectations or a focused vocational education program. To others the unspecial were those on the top end of the bottom spectrum. (p. 175)

And the fact that they have no advocates:

> Another fundamental characteristic of the unspecial is that they have no important allies or advocates. Top track students are blessed with a strong constituency of parents. The handicapped and those with a highly focused vocational interest, even the unruly, had their spokespeople, usually organized lobbies or political groups that generated money or mandates from legislatures and courts. (p. 176)

The parents of these youth are largely silent, because of the feeling that no news from school is good news or because they lack

savvy or combativeness to effect change. For example, whereas parents' organizations are the norm at all elementary schools and are typical at middle or junior highs, they seldom exist at the high school level. Why? One reason is that high school educators do not encourage them. Another reason is that the parents of the silent majority are, by now, almost completely silent. It's not that they don't care; they just seem to give up. As one counselor said, "Most parents are too busy trying to survive (raising a teenager) to try to tell the schools what to do" (Powell et al., 1985, p. 177). This is too bad because high school educators also have largely given up trying to advise students, particularly those from the academic middle, what to do.

Why High School Educators Look the Other Way

Conversations with high school principals, counselors, and teachers (the authors of this book have, at various times, served in all of these positions) leave little doubt that these professionals are aware of the growing number of academically average youth in the college prep programs who do not do very well but then still go on to 4-year colleges. In fact, guidance counselors are increasingly amazed at the ease with which students with mediocre academic credentials gain admittance into what used to be fairly selective colleges and universities. They also are well aware that few high school students know why they are going to college except that their parents want it, everyone else expects it, and there appear to be no alternatives. Here we get to the heart of the matter.

High schools are public institutions and, as such, are quite responsive—better yet, vulnerable—to community desires. The old saw among superintendents of schools was and still is that as long as the band plays on tune, the football team has a winning season, and the students get into college, the public is happy. It's true. National data indicate that most parents want their children to go to college, and in this day and age there is little stopping them. In the light of the turmoil that exists today in most high schools, few principals are willing to deliver this message: Many students enrolled in the college prep program are not prepared to do baccalaureate-level work. In a society in which "kill the messenger" is the rule, not the exception, the lack of willingness to deliver this message is

perhaps understandable. In fact, parents often do not "wake up" until the dreaded SAT or ACT college admissions test scores arrive. Meanwhile, school personnel are thankful that this insight is coming from someone else.

Are Guidance Counselors the Villains?

At this point in discussions of the unrealistic postsecondary plans of high school youth, many point their fingers at guidance counselors, who are viewed as the professionals responsible for reality therapy. Realistically, parents have only themselves to blame. As one counselor explained,

> For years, all we have heard is cases of successful college graduates who report that their guidance counselor told them not to go to college. After 20 years of this abuse and criticism, most counselors are a bit gun-shy about presenting any information, let alone advising that anyone should not go on to college.

Because the kill-the-messenger attitude pervades this situation, counselors, like other school personnel, end up looking the other way. It is easy to understand such attitudes. No parent, principal, or school board wants to hear this type of information. The open admissions policies at many colleges and universities enable all who want a degree from a 4-year college to get in somewhere anyway.

One other issue is more difficult for high school educators to duck: How can students be in a college prep program of study and get passing grades, yet end up in remedial courses in college?

Grade Inflation

Periodically, the media write about something called *grade inflation*. The term means that grades go up without requisite evidence that learning is increasing too; in fact, data often suggest just the opposite. For example, although SAT entrance test scores have stagnated over the years, the grade point averages reported by entering

college freshmen keep going up. In 1969, 12% of entering college freshmen said they had A averages, compared with 32% in 1993. Meanwhile, during the same period, the percentage reporting a C average in high school went from 32% to 16%. Similarly, in 1990, 80% of all freshmen entered college with a B average or better, yet a survey of college professors revealed that fewer than 10% thought that students were adequately prepared in math. Such data (from Samuelson, 1991) do not make sense: Grade point averages increase, yet objective assessments of readiness to do college-level work do not show similar increases? What is going on? Some authors (see Sedlak, 1986) suggest that a stalemate exists between teachers and the academically average youth in their classes. Teachers ask little of academically average students; in return, these students ask little of their teachers.

The Stalemate in High School Classrooms

Understanding the stalemate that exists between high school teachers and average students in college prep classes requires an appreciation of the impossible catch-22 situation that high school faculty find themselves in because of public demands. High schools are asked to do the impossible: Be rigorous but ensure that everyone gets grades that will enable him or her to get into college. Maybe it is possible for high schools to do both—high school bashers have made careers of suggesting that such action is possible—but under the circumstances, it is not. But as the experience at colleges (where most high school bashers work) has shown, standards are difficult to maintain when a priority is keeping the universities and colleges full. This point was aptly illustrated by cartoonist Garry Trudeau in his panel about a fraternity member who sued the university because he got a B+ instead of the expected A. Obviously, problems with grade inflation are not confined to high schools.

The public simply will not accept one basic reality: If a normal population of high school students is put into college prep courses that carry high academic performance standards (not to be confused with high expectations, which should be the norm for all students), not everyone is going to do well. Thus, if everyone is to do well, the only solution, at least given the current student-to-teacher ratio in U.S. high schools, is to lower standards. This is exactly what is

occurring in the college prep classes taken by those in the academic middle of U.S. high schools. Academically average students and their parents ask no questions as long as everyone gets average grades and into college; today, that is virtually ensured. If no one looks too closely at the learning that may or may not be taking place in classes populated by the academic middle, then everyone is content. One reason for this contentment is that the academically blessed receive a different college prep curriculum—one with real standards and failing grades—offered under code names such as advanced placement or honors courses.

The politics of the situation allow no other solution. The public wants all students in the high schools to graduate with high academic credentials so that they can go to college, but for a variety of reasons this task cannot be done. All but a few of these reasons are outside the schools' control, so high school faculty compromise; they offer a real college prep program for those who have the ability to do it, and a less rigorous curriculum for those who cannot or will not do as well. In the latter classes, teachers ask less of the students; in return, students and parents do not hassle the teachers. This "standoff" will not be easy to change as long as *one way to win* goes unchallenged.

SECTION II

Taking the High Ground: The Role of Elected Officials

Because the *one way to win* mentality is costing the federal government billions, not millions, of dollars (the number of federal student loans increased almost 50% between 1990 and 1994 when students borrowed $24.3 billion [Hartle, 1994]), the federal deficit is around $4.5 trillion, and no one wants to increase taxes, the nation's leaders could be expected to speak out about the need to consider alternatives. As columnist Robert Samuelson suggested, with tongue in cheek, all President Bush had to do to solve the student financial aid crisis was to announce, "I will veto legislation without adequate academic standards for aid. We will not fool our students or waste taxpayer's money by sending people to college who are not ready" (Samuelson, 1991, p. 44).[1] Well, President Bush did not take Samuelson's advice, nor did President Clinton; to date, no elected officials have

done so. Right behind the politically safe stands of being against crime and for tax relief and smaller government comes the promise of more money for college. Of course, we recognize these statements for what they are—promises.

When it comes to *one way to win*, the rhetoric is classic political "smoke and mirrors," at least at the federal level. Congress passes legislation that increases student aid, and then its members hit the campaign trail to bring the good news to their constituents. They fail to tell the whole story, however—namely, that although Congress passed a bill to increase student aid benefits, there is no money to fund it.

In the light of the "political hay" to be made from supporting the *one way to win* mentality, it is clearly unrealistic to think the federal government will urge the public to consider alternatives to a 4-year degree that will lead to a career in the professional ranks. In fact, often the political returns from promoting college attendance are so high that they actually lead to proposals that make no sense. For example, the Clinton administration at one point proposed a payback schedule for direct student loans that did not cover loan interest; over time, then, student loans would increase rather than decrease in size!

The political realities at the state level are no different. Despite unending fiscal crises in most states, state funding of student aid has increased. In the 1993-94 academic year, states spent a record $2.5 billion on student aid, an increase of 12% over the previous year (Ornstein, 1994). Again, beware. Where is this money coming from? It stems partially from a steady decline in states' support of their public universities systems; this decline, in turn, has led to a steady increase in tuition. Legislators correctly conclude that more political hay can be made by increasing financial aid grants and loans than by increasing state support to colleges and universities.

One final and important point should be made regarding politicians' use of the *one way to win* mentality to increase public approval of their performance. By doing so, they in effect lend considerable credence to the validity of the *one way to win* paradigm itself. When the president of the United States asserts that anyone who wants to go to college should be able to, the message is interpreted in a far larger context than may have been intended. In the classrooms and households of the United States, the message means that everyone *should* go to college. Some believe it even insinuates that something is wrong with anyone who does not *aspire* to go to college.

SECTION III

Behind the Scenes: Those With Vested ($) Interests

Each year, higher education is a $100 billion business in the United States. Revenues for higher education institutions alone are now approximately $120 billion (OERI, 1994). This amount may just be the tip of the proverbial iceberg because untold billions are generated by products and services related to higher education. College sports on national television, college and financial planners, money lenders, T-shirt manufacturers, textbook publishers, beer distributors, and providers of cram courses for entrance tests, to cite a few, all add up to staggering amounts for higher education. Thus, colleges and universities have become big business, and like all businesses, a steady supply of customers is essential. The point is that although most endorse *one way to win* because they believe it is sound advice for today's youth, others promote the value of college because their jobs depend on it.

No doubt, the largest vested interest in *one way to win* is the higher education community itself. Higher education is a huge service industry. It sells a service (education)—or more accurately, products (degrees)—employs people, and portrays itself as meeting a need and creating opportunity. If someone dropped in from another world and observed this activity, however, these efforts would more resemble marketers' efforts to create a need for a product in an oversaturated market.

Obviously, all is not well in this billion-dollar endeavor. The industry has overexpanded, classes are underenrolled, dorm rooms are empty, and revenue is down. Thus, recruitment, not excellence, is the priority at all but a few colleges. Although administrators at most colleges act as if admissions were selective, admissions are truly selective at only about 250 of the more than 3,000 institutions of higher education. In fact, most higher education institutions practice open admissions. Most take the best that apply even if the best of these are not qualified to do college work; as the adage goes, "Poor students are better than no students." What other explanation is there for the fact that 95% of all public 4-year colleges "offer" (a code word for *require*) remedial courses for entering students (College Entrance Board, 1993)?

One major tactic used by higher education in its increasingly sophisticated marketing efforts to keep colleges and universities full is to reinforce and play off the *one way to win* mentality. These efforts have been very successful. Opportunity and college have become synonymous, thanks in part to these efforts. Suffice it to say that higher education is a strong political force working overtly and covertly to sell and perpetuate *one way to win*. Questions about the sincerity of these efforts are left to the reader to decide. The point here is that those who seek to promote *other ways to win* should understand that the United States has an oversupply of baccalaureate degree-granting colleges. (Between 1980 and 1990, the number of public and private baccalaureate-level colleges actually increased despite a decreasing number of high school graduates.) You can expect these institutions to push hard the concept of the *one way to win* paradigm.

One final group deserves special mention among those with a vested interest in *one way to win*: the money lenders and financial planners for whom college mania has become a source of growth and profit. Need money for college? Plan now for college, ask about student loans. Are tuition bills due? Consider a home equity loan. These messages are heard day after day. In historical terms, a house used to be the largest purchase made by a family; now, for many it is their children's education. By promoting their services, these financial institutions are reinforcing the message and keeping public faith in higher education alive and well; after all, doing so is a dollar-and-cents issue.

Other Ways to Win

In this chapter, we explored the political realities behind the apparent lack of public concern for the plight of those from the academic middle of high school graduating classes. Aware of no other socially acceptable and economically promising alternatives, this group is heading off to college despite being unprepared for college-level work. Most never finish, however, but are successful in accumulating significant student loan debt. Yet, no one seems to voice much concern. There are few if any advocates for these students; teachers largely ignore them, and their parents are by and large powerless. Meanwhile, elected officials, even when faced with the economic realities of too many college students and too little money,

take the high ground and sidestep the problem. Also, for many individuals employed in primary or secondary higher education markets, ensuring a steady stream of students is essential for job security. Finally, political realities of locally controlled public schools and conflicting community expectations prevent high school educators from actively raising concerns about the appropriateness of student high school course-taking decisions, let alone postsecondary plans; it is just easier to look the other way.

These political realities make the creation of *other ways to win* more of a challenge but in no way diminish the need. In the *one way to win* game, most lose. The first losers are those who, early in their high school years, see college as an impossible reach. Unaware of alternatives that may be equally valued by teachers or the community, they give up, drop out, or stay in school but tune out instead. The second losers are those who go to college unprepared, end up in remedial courses, and slowly "cool out" of the system and never graduate. The final losers are those who actually persist, only to discover that few jobs are available in their major; these people typically end up underemployed. The majority of the losers are from the academic middle. Although assuredly some from the academic middle do graduate and do find commensurate college-level work, they are the minority; the majority would have benefited from alternatives, from *other ways to win*. In Part 3 of this book, we discuss ways to restructure the high school curriculum and high school guidance and placement services to provide these alternatives. We begin in Chapter 7 by outlining an economic rationale for alternatives that can be used to persuade the public—particularly students and parents—that there are *other ways to win*.

Note

1. R. Samuelson, August 31, 1992, p. 75. Copyright © 1992, Newsweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

PART III

Creating *Other Ways to Win*

7

The High Skill/ High Wage Rationale

[It is] just possible we have a surplus of graduates and a scarcity of [youth] with real skills.

R. Samuelson, (1992, p. 75)[1]

Reverse transfers comprise one of the fastest growing groups of students in higher education. A *reverse transfer* is a student who is working on or already holds a 4-year or even a graduate degree but still decides to matriculate in a 2-year associate degree program or even a 1-year certificate program at a community college. National data are not available in this area, but some 2-year postsecondary higher education institutions report that, in certain programs, reverse transfers represent the majority of their students.

Why would anyone with a bachelor's or advanced degree invest additional time and money in a lesser degree when doing so seems illogical? One clue can be gained by noting the specific technical programs that 2-year-program reverse transfers enroll in—for example, occupation-specific technical programs in fields such as medical technologies, electronics, and automated manufacturing. These students have discovered, albeit a bit late, that there are *other ways to win.* They have learned from experience that 4 or more years of college do not necessarily lead to a high-paying career but that an associate

degree or even a 1-year certificate program can if it is in a technical field. These college graduates have learned an all-important labor market fact the hard way: Earning high wages is a result of having occupational skills that are in demand, not of education per se. This relationship between skills and wages is the concept implied by the term *high skill/high wage* work. The skills required in many high skill/high wage occupations can be learned in associate degree programs in the technologies. They can even be gained in workplace programs such as apprenticeship programs in the skilled crafts. This high skill/high wage rationale forms the economic basis for the creation of alternatives or *other ways to win* for high school graduates.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the high skill/high wage rationale for creating alternatives for high school graduates who make up the academic middle. Our intention is to provide a rationale that can, in turn, be effectively communicated to students and parents. This chapter begins with an examination of five economic misconceptions held by students, parents, and educators that have led them to conclude there is only *one way to win*. Those who seek to promote alternatives must understand these misconceptions if they hope to argue for reasonable consideration of *other ways to win*.

SECTION I

Five Misconceptions About the Future Labor Market

Historically, the pressure to go to college has been fueled in the United States by issues of status and class. The relatively recent explosion of high school graduates seeking 4-year college degrees can be traced to economic uncertainty, particularly as it pertains to future occupational opportunities. Most people who press youth to go to college have good intentions and do so for sound economic reasons. To a certain degree, however, these beliefs are based on misconceptions or misinformation about future labor market opportunities. These misconceptions were listed in Chapter 2, but we return to them now for a more detailed discussion because those who seek to create *other ways to win* need to understand them if they hope to convince others of the merit of alternatives they may develop and recommend.

Misconception #1: In the future, most jobs will require a college degree.

Fact: Of 147 million jobs by the year 2005, only 32 million, or 21%, will require a college degree.

A widespread misconception is that, in the future, most jobs will require a college degree. This myth stems partly from general confusion about the fastest-growing occupations and those that will generate the greatest number of jobs. Although the number of jobs that require a college degree will increase more quickly than the number that do not (39% vs. 16%), in the foreseeable future, for every job that requires a college degree, four will not (Shelley, 1992). To a certain extent, however, this may be a moot point to most parents and students because they will argue that although most jobs will not require a college degree, all high-paying occupations will.

Misconception #2: Most high-wage jobs in the future will be in technical fields that require a college degree.

Fact: The largest and fastest-growing segment of the emerging technical workforce is occupations that do not require a 4-year college degree.

Most labor market experts agree that the most promising segment of the future workforce is comprised of technical workers. According to an article about this new "worker elite" in *Fortune*, since 1950 the number of technical workers has increased 300% and will represent one fifth of all employment by the year 2005 (Richman, 1994). There is little doubt that, aside from the traditional high-wage professions, the best opportunities for the future will be in the growing ranks of what Peter Drucker (1994) calls "knowledge workers." The public, however, has jumped to the conclusion that college training will be required for these jobs. Not so. As illustrated in Figure 7.1, the largest segment of technical workers is what the American Society for Training and Development calls "blue-collar technical workers." Using U.S. Department of Labor terms, these workers are primarily technicians or are employed in the crafts, precision metal, and specialized repair occupations. These jobs do require special skills; in some cases, they are best learned at the associate degree level, but they do not require a baccalaureate degree.

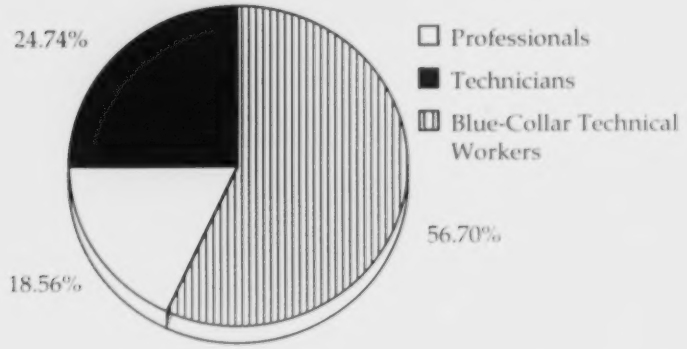


Figure 7.1. The Technical Workforce
SOURCE: Compiled from *Workplace Basics*, by A. Carnevale, L. Gainer, and A. Meltzer, 1990, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, pp. 7-23.

In fact, among technical occupations, those that require a 4-year college degree are the fewest in number and, on a percentage basis, the slowest growing (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990).

Misconception #3: The total labor force demand for college graduates is sufficient to ensure employment for all who receive a 4-year college degree.

Fact: The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts that, through the year 2005, 1 in 3 college graduates will not find college-level employment; among those preparing for the professions, this number will be 1 in 2.

In the light of rapid growth in enrollment in 4-year colleges by graduating high school seniors, one must conclude that they, their parents, and everyone else who advises them to go to college assume that the economy will generate increasing college-level employment to accommodate the increasing percentages of young adults who will earn a college degree. Unfortunately, this is not true. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor forecasts (Heckin, 1992), 4-year colleges will graduate 300,000 to 400,000 more students without a commensurate increase in college-level jobs through the year 2005. This forecast suggests that literally millions of 4-year degree holders will be un-

deremployed by the turn of the century. As dismal as these forecasts sound for college graduates, however, they are a conservative estimate that, among other things, does not take into account migration into the U.S. by college graduates from abroad or competition for business that creates jobs from technical workers in the global workforce. Thus, the actual supply of college graduates may, in a global sense, exceed the demand for their services to an even greater extent than conveyed by U.S. Bureau of Labor projections. Even these facts may not be totally persuasive, however, because many people have concluded that this oversupply of college graduates is an even greater reason to get a 4-year degree because, in the future, a college degree will become what a high school diploma is today—namely, the entrance requirement for the majority of jobs.

Misconception #4: In the light of the oversupply of college graduates, college graduates will displace nondegree holders in good jobs that do not require a college degree.

Fact: Surveys of employers have not revealed that they prefer college graduates for jobs that do not require a degree. In particular, college graduates will not displace nondegree holders who have specialized occupational skills.

This myth moves closer to the heart of the fears that fuel the mania for a 4-year college degree—namely, the worry that an increase in the number of 4-year degree holders will result in those without a baccalaureate degree not being able to compete even for jobs that do not require a college education. Scant evidence supports this fear. In a national survey of employers in the 13 largest industrial sectors, "10 of 13 industry groups ranked the need for vocational training higher than the need for a college degree" (Stern, 1992, p. 1); this finding confirms the importance of skill, not degrees, in the hiring decisions made by firms.

Accounts of college graduates being told they are "overqualified" are heard more frequently than are stories of skilled persons who apply for high skill/high wage work, only to lose that work to someone with no skills but a 4-year liberal arts degree. This latter illustration is important. As discussed shortly, earnings in the labor force are a return for skills in demand, not for education per se. There will undoubtedly be cases of 4-year degree holders pushing out high

school graduates in some low skill/low wage work, particularly in retailing and recreation. In the competition for technical high skill/high wage occupations, however, they will not displace high school graduates or associate degree graduates who have the required prerequisite skills.

The logic of pursuing a 4-year college degree because it may lead to labor market advantage in competing for low skill/low wage work makes little dollar-and-cents sense. A 4-year college degree can cost anywhere from $50,000 to $120,000. Add the interest costs from student loans and foregone earnings while in college, and this situation makes even less sense. The hard reality is that a growing number of college degree holders may never see a positive return on their higher education investment; they may never get a job that allows them to recoup their higher education investment.

Misconception #5: Because higher education is highly correlated with future earnings, education guarantees a higher income.

Fact: In the labor market, above-average wages are a return for occupational skills in demand, not education per se.

The widely held first four misconceptions have, in turn, led to the seemingly universal faith that more education will guarantee high future earnings. This is a classic case of ex post facto thinking that confuses correlation with causation. Although education and earnings are correlated, high wage rates are paid in the labor market as a premium for specialized skills in demand. This fact explains why some occupations that do not require a college degree, such as electrician, specialized health technicians, and manufacturing technicians, pay more than many occupations that require a baccalaureate degree. It also explains what is meant by the term *high skills/high wage work*. The reason wages and higher education are highly correlated is that, in many high-paying occupations, the prerequisite skills that earn the premium wages are learned in a 4-year college program. But this is certainly not the case for all high-paying occupations. Importantly, although the best source of future high skill/high wage work will be the growing technical workforce, the majority of these occupations do not require a 4-year college degree. The key to economic security is obtaining occupational skill, not a 4-year college degree.

SECTION II

The High Skill/High Wage Rationale for Creating *Other Ways to Win*

If the goal of students is future economic security, the focus of their postsecondary planning should be on obtaining job skills that prepare them to compete for a limited supply of high skill/high wage work. This focus differs significantly from that of getting a 4-year college degree on the basis of the naive faith that it will lead to a good job. This advice is particularly suited for high school graduates from the academic middle of their graduating class because odds are they will not be among those who ultimately will find a college-level job even if they do graduate. Despair is not the appropriate emotion, however; there are *other ways to win*. As pointed out in a recent U.S. Department of Labor publication, "Workers with less education, but who are employed in jobs that require special skills or training, earn as much as [4-year] college graduates who do not require [skills] training to get their jobs" (Eck, 1993, p. 37).

The message for academically average students is that they should consider, from among the high skill/high wage occupations, those for which the job prospects are good and the prerequisite skills can be learned at the postsecondary 2-year technical degree level or in work-based training programs. They should also develop a career plan that enables them to learn the skills needed to compete for these occupations. Examples of such occupations are provided below.

Examples of Pre-Baccalaureate High Skill/High Wage Occupations

The best way for academically average students to win in the fierce competition for above-average-paying jobs in the future is to focus on getting the skills needed to compete for high skill/high wage occupations that require something less than a 4-year college degree. Table 7.1 lists some of these occupations according to broad industry categories.

This list is by no means complete; even within these limited occupation titles, there are thousands of individual job titles for each

TABLE 7.1 Worker Elite High Skill/High Wage Occupations Not Requiring a Baccalaureate Degree

Craft and Construction
- Construction Drafting
- Construction Project Manager
- Heating/Air-Conditioning Technician
- Plumbing/Pipe-Fitting Technician
- Precision Welding
- Specialized Carpentry and Installation
- Specialized Interior Finishing and Installation

Health Occupations
- Dental Assistant
- Dental Hygienist
- Emergency Medical Technician
- Home Health Aide
- Licensed Practical Nurse
- Medical Laboratory Technician
- Medical Record Technician
- Optometric Technician
- Radiology Technician
- Surgical Technologist

Manufacturing
- Computer Controlled Equipment Operator
- Drafting Technicians
- Electronics Engineering Technician
- Electronics Lab Technician
- Engineering Technician
- Manufacturing Systems Operators
- Manufacturing Technician

Service Occupations
- Accountant
- Agribusiness Sales
- Automatic Office Manager
- Commercial Design
- Computer Graphics Specialist
- Criminal Justice and Corrections
- Data Processing Manager
- Fire Fighters
- Law Enforcement/Protection Occupations
- Library Technician
- Paralegal
- Professionally Trained Chef
- Specialty Auto Mechanic

Technical Service, Repair, and Installation
- Airframe Mechanic
- Avionics Repair Technician
- Biomedical Equipment Technician
- Computer Systems Installation and Repair
- Electro-mechanical Repair Technician
- Telecommunications Installations and Repair

occupation. All of these occupations pay yearly earnings above the national average. The key to obtaining these jobs and earnings is occupational skills. For example, whereas an untrained short-order cook earns minimum wage, a professionally trained chef from one of

the recognized culinary institutes earns a higher starting wage than a schoolteacher. If the chef is even moderately successful, he or she will always outearn public school teachers—and the majority of college professors as well.

Of course, money and the status of going on to postsecondary education is not everything. Aside from monetary rewards from jobs, most individuals also seek and are the most successful in careers that are consistent with their interests, talents, and perceptions of themselves. As indicated by this list, prebaccalaureate high skill/high wage work can appeal to all types of individual interests and preferences. There are occupational choices for those who want to help people, who like to work outdoors, who like to take things apart, who are artistically creative, who want to work on the East Coast or the West Coast, and who want to dress professionally each day (or not). The choices are endless.

How does one learn the prerequisite skills required in the high skills/high wage occupations? They are learned in a variety of settings. Table 7.2, for example, portrays the occupational structure in the construction and manufacturing fields. Some occupations, particularly in construction crafts, can actually be learned in high school vocational education programs. Still others can be learned in formal work-based training programs, such as apprenticeships organized by employer and employee groups. Most, however, require either 1- or 2-year postsecondary educational training; if they do not require it, having postsecondary training results in a labor market advantage in competing for jobs.

This latter point is important: A majority of today's high school students and their parents have decided that their only option is to attend a higher education institution after graduation, and currently their preference is a 4-year college education. Although they may be open to alternatives to a 4-year college degree, it is unlikely they will be receptive to plans that do not include some type of postsecondary education. Because many high skill/high wage occupations require postsecondary education—but at the pre-baccalaureate level—those in the academic middle can both go on to higher education and prepare for occupations in which their chance for success is good. Furthermore, many such 2-year postsecondary technical programs articulate with 4-year baccalaureate programs and thus provide an opportunity for those who do well at the 2-year postsecondary level to proceed with further academic study.

TABLE 7.2 High Skill/High Wage Occupations in Construction/Manufacturing

Occupational Group	*Craftperson* *Blue-Collar Technical*	*Technician*	*Professional Technical*	
Preparation Required	High School Voc Ed Apprenticeships 1-Year Technical Certificate	2-Year Associate Degree	4-Year Degree	Graduate School
Typical Job Function	Testing Service Maintenance Routine Analysis		Manufacturing Production Operations	Complex Design Product Development Testing and Evaluation
	Repair Assemble Operate Construct	Quality Assurance Technical Sales Maintenance	Routine Design	Basic Research Research Development Theoretical Analysis
Representative Job Titles	Electrician Factory Assembler Tester Machinist Operator Computer Operator Mechanic	Engineer Aide Service Technician Drafter Foreman Programmer Inspector	System Analyst Technical Sales/ Services Project Manager Technical Operations Manager Customer Service Representative Field Operations Supervisor Data Com. Manager Surveyor	Design Engineer Systems Engineer Product Development Supervisor Plant Manager Engineer	Research Scientist Engineer Mathematician Physicist Professor

What about future employment prospects? Compared with the outlook for 4-year college degree graduates, the employment outlook for those preparing for high skill/high wage work requiring less than a 4-year degree (pre-baccalaureate) is great!

Occupational Outlook for High Skill/High Wage Occupations Not Requiring a Baccalaureate Degree

The occupational and earnings outlook for most high skill/high wage occupations that require less than a baccalaureate degree is generally good. To begin with, all technical or information workers are projected to comprise one fifth of all workers by the year 2005. As illustrated in Figure 7.1, a majority of these occupations will not require a 4-year college degree but do require prerequisite skills; thus, those not having a 4-year college degree but who do have relevant skills will not be in danger of being displaced by unskilled baccalaureate degree holders. Meanwhile, the earnings of those holding prebaccalaureate high skill/high wage jobs will compare favorably with most college graduates and will exceed those of many. These statements are supported by the labor market data summarized in Table 7.3.

TABLE 7.3 Occupational Groups Ranked by Earnings, Net Openings, Percentage Female, Required Training

	Earnings	*Net Openings*	*% Female*	*Required Training*
Managerial/ Professional	1	6	47%	1
Craft, Precision Metal, Specialized Repair	2	3	9%	2
Technical Support	3	1	64%	3
Service	4	4	25%	5
Operative, Laborer	5	2	60%	4
Farming, Fishing	6	5	16%	6

SOURCES: Date compiled from "Job-Related Education and Training: Their Impact on Earnings," by A. Eck, 1993, *Monthly Labor Review*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor; and *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1994*, by U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994, Washington, DC: Author.

Table 7.3 contains important information for those who seek to alert students from the academic middle, their parents, and faculty that there are *other ways to win* besides a 4-year college degree. In the first column of the table are listed six broad occupational clusters used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census when collecting monthly employment and wage data.

The second column of Table 7.3 ranks the occupational groups from highest to lowest according to the average annual salary of individuals who work in occupations contained in each cluster. The highest-earning group is managerial/professional, which includes lawyers, doctors, accountants, schoolteachers, and so forth. This ranking is probably not a surprise and actually lies behind the *one way to win* paradigm. But wait. What is the second highest-paying group? It is craft, precision metal, and specialized repair; this category includes those in the building trade occupations, manufacturing systems technicians, electro-mechanical repair specialists, and so forth. And notice the third highest-paying occupational group—technicians, which includes medical lab techs, electronics lab techs, electronics engineering techs, and so forth.

Many high skill/high wage occupations that do not require a BA degree can be found in all six clusters—agribusiness, for example, employs thousands of technical workers—but the largest numbers of these occupations are found in the craft/precision metal/repair and technical support clusters. This concentration of high skill/high wage occupations that do not require a BA degree in the second and third highest-paying occupational clusters provides the fundamental rationale for creating *other ways to win*. Specifically, it explains the following reality:

> On average, the yearly income of individuals employed in the craft/precision metal/repair areas and as technicians will be higher than that for all college graduates except those who find work in the managerial/professional ranks.

The importance of this labor market reality is magnified by considering the occupational opportunity outlook in these clusters that is summarized in the third column of Table 7.3. In this column, the six occupational groups are rank-ordered according to net (demand minus supply) job opportunities. Now a more complex and revealing picture unfolds. Although managerial/professional is the

highest-paying cluster, it ranks last in terms of opportunity; in fact, in many occupations, the demand for workers is half that of the yearly supply of new job seekers. For example, each year, colleges graduate 58,000 students with degrees in accounting for only 38,000 projected jobs. Although the public thinks there is a shortage of engineers, there is a worldwide glut; in the United States alone, colleges graduate 85,000 engineers yearly for 52,000 jobs (see Table 5.2).

Meanwhile, notice that the second and third highest-paying occupational group—craft/precision metal/repair and technical support, are also third and first, respectively, in projected job opportunities. In many occupations within these two occupational clusters, wages are high and the number of job openings greatly exceeds the number of individuals training for these jobs. For example, in the craft/precision metal/repair cluster, training programs prepare annually only 133,000 workers for 455,000 high skill/high wage jobs. Opportunities in this category are tremendous and often are overlooked because, relative to other occupational groups, its size is small and actually getting smaller. This decline in numbers, however, reflects the growing technical nature of the workplace that requires fewer workers but a higher skill level for those who remain. Importantly, the rising skill level of those jobs that remain has resulted in increasing wages. It is not uncommon for a cross-skilled electrician in technical manufacturing to earn $80,000 a year with 4 weeks of vacation and job offers that would make most lawyers envious.

Opportunities for Special Populations

In Chapter 3, it was argued that although it is a matter of national pride that those who can benefit from a 4-year college program be able to do so regardless of socioeconomic background or gender, special populations may well be the most hurt by the existence of a single alternative—namely, a 4-year college degree—and therefore would benefit the most from socially acceptable and economically viable alternatives. The fourth column of Table 7.3 illustrates this point in more concrete terms. It shows the percentage of women in the workforce in each occupational cluster. Women have just about gained parity in the highest-paying occupational group—namely, managerial professional. As a result, the competition among college graduates of both

genders for the few jobs in the professional ranks should get even fiercer. But notice the percentage of women in the second highest-paying group, craft/precision metal/specialized repair. Only 9% of that workforce are women. The numbers for minorities are similar. Although the growth in the ranks of women and minorities who are chief executives receives most of the press, the real problem is that, aside from health occupations, too few of either are among the ranks of technical workers.

Importance of Occupational Skill and Postsecondary Technical Education

The final column of Table 7.3 confirms the high skill/high wage rationale for the creation of *other ways to win*—specifically, the argument that the objective of postsecondary education is to acquire the skills required to obtain high skill/high wage work, not just a degree per se, and that high wages are a return for these skills. In the fifth column, the occupational clusters are ranked from highest to lowest by percentage of workers who reported to the U.S. Bureau of the Census that their job requires some degree of formal training. If skills, not education, are the key to high wages, one would expect the rank ordering of the six occupational groups according to earnings and the percentage of workers reporting that their job requires prerequisite skills to be the same. This is exactly what was found for the three highest-paying occupational groups. Importantly, only in the managerial/ professional group are these skills learned primarily at the 4-year college degree level; in the other two categories, the majority of occupations are best prepared for at the 1- and 2-year postsecondary level (see Table 7.1) or in formal on-the-job training programs such as apprenticeships.

The high skill/high wage rationale provided above provides a strong argument that *other ways to win* do not require a 4-year college degree. This is the rationale behind creating alternatives for those in the academic middle. Understanding this rationale is critical for those who seek to create alternatives. It is even more critical that the rationale be effectively communicated to parents and students. Thus, we conclude this chapter by suggesting five points to present to parents.

Five Points to Make With Parents

Those who seek to create alternatives for students in the academic middle need to know why pursuing a 4-year college degree is not a sound plan for many students and what alternative labor market opportunities exist. Ultimately, however, high school students, their parents, and even many educators must be convinced. To assist in this mission to dispel the *one way to win* myth, the following five points should be considered before deciding on a 4-year degree program.

Five Things to Consider Before Deciding to Pursue a Four-Year College Degree

Point 1. Because of open admissions, getting into college is relatively easy, whereas graduating is not. Only about half who matriculate ever graduate in 6 years.

Point 2. In the decade ahead, the number of 4-year college graduates will far exceed job opportunities.

Point 3. Technical workers are the fastest-growing and economically most promising segment of the labor force.

Point 4. The largest number and fastest-growing group of jobs among technical workers can be trained for at the 2-year associate degree level.

Point 5. On average, technical workers without a 4-year college degree will earn higher salaries than all 4-year college graduates except those who find work in the professional ranks.

In summary, the point to be made in offering this five-point argument to students and parents is that although the decision to attend a 4-year college is theirs to make, they should understand (a) that they face high odds, particularly when one graduates from high school with poor academic credentials and (b) that there are alternatives. The issue of higher education costs was not included in this argument, but some of you may wish to add it. Data regarding the magnitude of the average student loan debt typically acquired by those pursuing a baccalaureate degree can be a real wake-up call. Thus, some people may wish to add this dimension to the argument;

others may think that discussion of money is a private matter. Ultimately, each person must tailor this argument and data to meet his or her circumstances.

Other Ways to Win

The rather dramatic increase in 4-year college attendance by graduating high school seniors can be traced to genuine economic uncertainty about the future employment outlook. This uncertainty has led to the "anxious class"; this anxiety has led to the conclusion that the best bet is a 4-year degree. In previous chapters, we explored the harm done by this one-sided advice. In this chapter, economic labor market data were presented that demonstrate the presence of a good alternative—namely, 2-year technical education that will lead to high skill/high wage careers in the ranks of the new technocrats.

The message to students, parents, and teachers is that, on the basis of the five points outlined here, there are *other ways to win.* Although going to a 4-year college in preparation for the professions is a very good postsecondary plan for some students, is it a realistic plan for all? A good alternative for those who want to go on to higher education, particularly for those from the academic middle as indicated by their high school academic performance, is 2-year technical education in preparation for competing for high skill/high wage work.

Persuading students and parents that something less than a 4-year degree is worth considering will not be an easy sell. It will require significant counseling and career planning involving both parents and students. This guidance is the topic of Chapter 8.

Note

1. R. Samuelson, August 31, 1992, p. 75. Copyright © 1992, Newsweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

8

Step 1

Providing Systematic Career Guidance for Students and Structured Feedback for Parents

A parent's understanding is an incredible gift.
D. Muse

A widely held misconception in U.S. high schools is that students are tracked into a regimented set of courses that limits their options. In fact, the opposite is more often the case. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, students had to complete a structured program of study to graduate from high school, today they need only accumulate a specified number of credits in broad content areas. The bottom line: Students can take nearly any course they or their parents choose. The implication of this trend for this discussion is that the success of creating *other ways to win* depends first and foremost on parents' and students' decisions that these alternatives are worth enrolling in.

The most sophisticated and well-intended efforts to provide students from the academic middle with more realistic postsecondary alternatives will fail if students and their parents do not buy the

concept and elect the appropriate programs of study. Nor should one underestimate the difficulty of convincing these clients of the public school system that there is value in anything less than the traditional college prep program of study and pursuit of a 4-year degree. Aside from the genuine parental concern for the economic future of children and from the social pressure to go to college, a well-financed higher education primary and secondary industry has a vested interest in maintaining the conventional wisdom of *one way to win* in order to maintain the enrollments at baccalaureate colleges.

For these reasons, the first steps in creating *other ways to win* are to institute (a) a systematic career guidance program for all high school students and (b) a systematic program to provide honest, objective feedback to all parents so that they can evaluate their children's readiness to pursue a 4-year college degree. These two activities are discussed in this chapter.

SECTION I

Systematic Career Guidance for All Students

The need for better career guidance for youth is highlighted in many data sources that may be found virtually everywhere. Although 68.8% of all graduating female high school students expect to be working in the professions by the age of 30, most probably have not thought seriously about career plans. In the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study (Gray et al., 1993), for example, a majority of all students indicated they wished they had more opportunities to explore careers. Important for this discussion, of the three academic groupings identified in the study, those who graduated with the poorest academic credentials were the most likely to wish they had more career guidance. It is not a coincidence that the federal School to Work Opportunity Act (SWOA) of 1994, which was designed for non-baccalaureate-bound youth, called for career awareness and exploration as the first of six required school-based components. All students—but particularly those from the academic middle, whose postsecondary plans seem seriously out of sync with their academic

records and labor market projections—would benefit from a systematic career guidance effort.

Systematic Career Guidance Defined

Contemporary views of career guidance suggest it is more than a set of activities and services; it is a systematic program aimed at a specific outcome. The outcome at the junior and senior high school levels is the development of a level of individual career maturity that will lead to realistic high school academic course selection; such selection, in turn, will increase the probability that each student, especially those in the academic middle, will make a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education or to a career. Career guidance should be coordinated and coherent in its responsibilities to students and to parents. More about this topic is discussed in Section II of this chapter.

The principal emphasis in career guidance at the high school level should be on secondary and postsecondary academic and career planning. Such planning should begin by elevating the readiness of adolescents to participate in life as independent, goal-directed persons and then move on to aiding in tentative career choices. These choices are to be confirmed or modified by academic performance and changing preferences as a student progresses through high school. The significant point here is that career guidance program activities in the senior high school must take each student from where he or she is in coping with developmental tasks integral to career development and lead that person to create a specific set of preferences and plans for achieving these goals (which is the substance of the individual career plan discussed below).

Within a systematic career guidance program are myriad activities that can facilitate career maturity that, in turn, will lead to realistic high school course selection and postsecondary plans. For a complete discussion of these alternatives, consult Herr and Cramer's *Career Guidance and Counseling Through the Life Span* (1992). We chose here to emphasize what should be the heart of a systematic career guidance program for all students: the individual career plan (ICP). Before we discuss the ICP, it is important that the reader understand

TABLE 8.1. Career Maturity Through Young Adulthood

Approximate Ages				
Preschool	*5-9*	*10-14*	*15-18*	*19+*
Formulation of Self-Concept →		Translation Into Postsecondary Plan		
Developing Preferences →			Choice →	Transition
Fantasy →		Tentative →		Realistic

SOURCE: Figure created from table presented in Roe, A. (1954). A new classification of occupations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1, 215-220.

the concept of career maturity, the development of which is the goal of an ICP.

The Problem of Adolescent Career Immaturity

One very important aspect of individual development is career development. *Career development* is the lifelong process of decisions and actions taken to decide on, prepare for, transition to, and be successful in an occupation or occupations. Psychologists and vocational guidance specialists have studied career development and have constructed a model of the typical career development phases of youth (Herr & Cramer, 1992, p. 308). This model is presented in Table 8.1.

Notice that each phase is associated with a typical chronological age. An individual exhibiting signs of "mature" career development will be in the phase of career development appropriate for her or his age. According to the model, a mature individual should have moved from fantasy in the elementary grades to realism at the time of graduation from high school—realism in terms of having made a "tentative" decision to prepare to enter a particular field of work. Importantly, this decision, though tentative, is mature to the degree to which it is based on a "realistic" assessment of skills and/or preparation at the time of high school graduation, as well as on projected labor force opportunities. When roughly 70% of all female high school graduates and 50% of all male graduates indicate they

expect to work in the professions, one can make a strong argument that massive career immaturity (see Hoyt, 1994) is afoot in U.S. high schools. Understanding the thought process that leads to this massive fantasy is critical to planning efforts to improve the career maturity of those in the academic middle. In this case, psychological decision-making theories are useful.

Career development theories are best thought of as theories about how individuals make decisions—in this case, decisions about what type of work they will prepare for and engage in. Most of the theories are predicated on the assumption of logical decisions based on the availability of information. Most of the theories also are based in economics; they hold that any choice will maximize gain and minimize loss in aspects that are the most important to the particular individual (e.g., income, prestige, security) (Herr & Cramer, 1992, p. 164).

Some theories, such as Holland's (1982), are optimistic, democratic, and therefore intuitively pleasing. Such characteristics suggest that career decisions are "an expression of personality and not a random event. Individuals choose an occupation that is consistent with an individual's personality or self-concept" (p. 198). Yet, this construct seems inadequate for explaining the current situation; almost two thirds of high school students are making the same postsecondary choice—namely, attending a 4-year college to gain entry into the professional occupations—but certainly they cannot all have the same abilities or personalities.

A theory is needed that explains a seeming suppression of individual differences, one that explains irrational acts and bad decisions or indecision. Cognitive dissonance theory seems to best explain the present state of affairs. Individuals faced with either too much, too little, or conflicting information make decisions intended to reduce the personal anxiety created by this overload; in this case, they decide to go to college. As suggested by Herr and Cramer (1992),

> The magnitude of information and the number of factors to be considered in decision making are so great that the individual chooses prematurely, without fully considering the implications of the choice, in order to reduce the besieging pressures as the torrents of information relevant to the choice are sorted out. The person then reinforces the choice by rationalization: selective attention to those data making the

> choice appear satisfying to self and to external observers. Although the chooser "knows" there are other options and better ones, particularly over the longer range, it is comforting to make a selection and suppress the costs of its unrealism. (p. 177)

This thesis clearly describes the present situation. One key phrase is "external observers." For example, Jepsen (1989) speculates that, in adolescence, most career decisions are made in response to a social context. He argues that adolescents are greatly influenced by various reference groups, such as parents, teachers, and friends. These groups send overt and/or subtle messages regarding their expectations. Adolescents respond to these expectations, sometimes referred to as peer or parental pressure, in overt and covert ways. In short, they say and do one thing but think another. They do what conforms to social expectations—in this case, they go to college and express an intent to enter the professions—even though they covertly or privately know it is the wrong decision.

Gelatt (1989, p. 253) suggests that this is all normal under the circumstances. In what must be identified as a classic positive spin, he calls this situation "positive uncertainty," a healthy response to an unknown future caused by ambiguous and conflicting information. In Gelatt's model, the *one way to win* mentality is natural. It may well be understandable, given that no viable alternatives are provided, but it is also terribly costly to all except underenrolled 4-year colleges and universities. It is especially costly to those in the academic middle, where the losers in the *one way to win* game greatly outnumber winners, even among those few who actually persist in their quest for a baccalaureate degree. Thus, the first goal of efforts to create alternatives for those in the academic middle is to replace "positive uncertainty" with "tentative certainty" among high school youth through systematic career guidance. The key element in this program is the ICP.

The Individual Career Plan

An *individual career plan* (ICP) is a process that leads to a product (the plan) that assists students and parents in relating each student's

career interests and postsecondary higher education aspirations to individual aptitudes and achievements. The specific objective is to make a plan of action that the student will follow after graduation. The plan provides concrete postsecondary plans and tentative career goals, identifies the steps (e.g., courses to be taken in high school) that are required, and reinforces the commitment and responsibility of each student to take charge of his or her career. This written document is developed jointly by students, their parents, and school personnel. It becomes a part of the student's permanent record file. Thus, although ICP development is a joint venture and the postsecondary plan ultimately reflects decisions made by students and parents, the school is responsible for managing the process and for providing students and parents with objective data that enable them to periodically evaluate the feasibility of the plan. This critical issue is discussed later in the chapter.

Because there are a number of ICP models, ultimately each high school faculty member will have to select one or develop his or her own. One such model, called "Get a . . . Life" Personal Planning Portfolio, was developed by the American School Counselor Association with a grant from the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC). The program is systematic; it recommends certain activities at certain specific points in the K-12 years for each student. The resultant portfolio becomes part of a student's permanent record and follows him or her from one level of schooling to another. The Personal Planning Portfolio is divided into two strategic parts. The first, the personal file, contains individual reflections about tentative career plans that are gained from career guidance activities that the school system provides to all students. The second, the competency file, contains objective data that the school system provides regarding a student's academic achievements and abilities. The school expands the competency file at least once each year—usually at the end of each year—on the basis of the student's academic achievements and experiences.

Ideally, the portfolio would first be developed in the seventh or eighth grade so that it could serve as a basis for high school first-year course selection. In these early years, the vast majority of plans will call for preparation for the transition to a 4-year college and plans to pursue professional work. In the seventh, eighth, and even ninth grades, this level of unreality is tolerable and perhaps even desirable.

Clearly, though, the goal is to have students and parents, by the end of the tenth grade or at the latest the eleventh grade, facing the reality that, for most students—in our estimate, 70%—the *one way to win* paradigm of a 4-year college degree and a career in the professions is not very realistic.

Once again, the goal of this model and of all others is to move students from a state of career immaturity or naive optimism to a state of career maturity or tentative certainty. This transition is achieved by structuring situations that juxtapose tentative postsecondary plans with objective data regarding academic ability and achievement. Thus, it is important that the ICP strategy chosen or developed include periodic "wake-up calls" or objective feedback to students and parents that facilitates the most realistic evaluation of postsecondary plans and career aspirations.

Unfortunately, since the 1960s, high school educators have grown leery of activities designed to give parents anything but good news. This attitude is understandable because, increasingly, parents either lay total blame on the school or ignore the message. Tired of hearing from parents and others about the one youth who went to college and graduated despite his counselor's assessment that he was not college material, counselors also have taken a passive role. This attitude must change. Presenting the type of data described above to parents as part of an ICP process will help high school educators become more willing to deliver wake-up calls. After all, these data are part of an ongoing process that includes delivery of an important message: Postsecondary plans are your (parents and students) decision; our (educators) role is to provide the best education possible to achieve these plans but also to provide you with objective data regarding your probability of academic success.

Such thoughtful confrontation between plans and academic achievement is critical to the creation of *other ways to win* because it ensures that the alternative emphasis within the college prep program of study recommended in the next chapter will be considered seriously. The critical players in this thoughtful confrontation are, of course, individual students, but parents also play an important role. In fact, the successful creation of *other ways to win* relies on reaching out to parents to challenge the *one way to win* myth and to provide them with advice and counsel regarding their children's higher education plans.

SECTION II

Providing Feedback to Parents

It is unlikely that even the most sophisticated career guidance program will successfully create a modest level of career maturity among high school seniors or interest them in more realistic postsecondary educational alternatives unless it is accompanied by a parallel effort to provide counseling through objective feedback to parents on labor market realities, college costs, and their child's academic credentials. The parents' role in promoting the *one way to win* mentality was documented in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2.1). The forces behind the parental *one way to win* push are complex. They include the reality that (a) college attendance has replaced high school graduation as the final visible sign of parental effectiveness and (b) society seems to agree that once their adolescent is in college, parents have provided the most important opportunity in the society for their child and have done all they can. Parents have their children's best interests in mind when they promote 4-year college because they see it as the *only way to win*. To quote Secretary of Labor Robert Reich,

> A widening economic gap between better-educated and less skilled workers is creating an "anxious class" of Americans worried about the kind of future their children will face. These people . . . are justifiably uneasy about their own standing and fearful about their children's futures. (Naylor, 1994, p. A4)

Reich's "anxious class" probably includes parents of students in the academic middle. These parents may themselves be in jobs threatened by downsizing or technological elimination. Faced with such uncertainty, they would certainly hope to protect their children from a similar fate in the future. They read that college graduates currently earn 83% more than high school graduates over their lifetimes and conclude that a 4-year college degree is the only hope, the *only way to win*. Although this logic is flawed, parents can be very reluctant to endorse alternatives, or as summarized by Paul Barton (1994, p. 3) of the Policy Information Center, "Parents generally fear

what appears to them to be any form of tracking away from the college route," a point we return to in Chapters 9 and 10.

Thus, working effectively with parents rests on effective communication of the economic axioms of career planning and provision of objective data regarding outlooks for academically average students. At the same time, it means being mindful that, for many parents, anything less than a 4-year degree for their child will be very difficult to accept. In this context, when and how feedback and counseling regarding their child's developing academic credentials are provided becomes very important. Such information needs to be highly structured and the same for all parents of all high school students. Separate efforts, distinct from programs for the academically blessed, will not work.

Delivering the Wake-Up Call to Parents

Parental involvement is widely viewed as a key factor in school effectiveness (see "Amherst School," 1994). Therefore, public school educators expend considerable energy promoting parental involvement and parent groups at the elementary and middle school levels. These efforts typically diminish, however, once students get to high school. It is difficult to decide whether this withering of parental involvement is because of the belief by high school educators that parental interaction is not traditional at this level or because, over the years, parents become less inclined to be involved at the high school level and thus stop trying. There are some exceptions, however, such as the Connecticut Regional Vocational High Schools, wherein secondary schools have very active and effective parent associations. These and other success stories around the United States prove that it is possible to get high school parents more involved than is currently the practice.

Our argument is that such parental involvement is not only possible but essential to successful efforts to get those in the academic middle to consider alternatives. Parents are intimately involved in the present pressure on youth to go to a 4-year college. If students are to be receptive to alternatives, their parents must be too. The following 4-step program is recommended.

A Four-Step Parental Involvement Program

In the 4-step or 4-part parental involvement program described below, the intent is to increase the involvement of all parents in the selection of secondary-level courses and programs of study, as well as in the formulation of postsecondary plans. Although the objective is to improve communication with parents of students in the academic middle, the program is for all parents. An emphasis is placed on "structure." It is recommended that a strategy to involve parents be highly structured: Parents should understand the purpose of the program—namely, better academic and postsecondary planning for their children—and know when the critical decision points in high school program course selection are and how to use data provided by the school to evaluate their child's ICP.

The program begins with a meeting of eighth-grade parents.

Step 1: Have an Eighth-Grade Parent Meeting

The best time to involve parents in the tentative formulation of secondary and postsecondary plans for their children is when the children are getting ready to start high school. This point in time is strategic and the best opportunity to get their attention and involvement. Most high schools have orientation meetings for parents, but these are a one-shot effort not connected to anything other than an "orientation." Unless a student is exceptional in either a positive or negative sense, parents hear or receive nothing further from the high school except during report card periods. This point is particularly true of the parents of academically average youth; they are less apt to initiate meetings with teachers.

We recommend a parental involvement program that is considerably more extensive. This program would be explained during an eighth-grade meeting; other activities would include presenting the five points that should be considered before decisions are made about a 4-year college education (as outlined in Chapter 7). The major purpose of this meeting would be to acquaint parents with the school's expectations of them and to hear what they expect of the school. Specifically, school administrators would expect the parents to be active participants in the development of their child's tentative

career plan and to be part of and an extension of the school's career guidance program. As such, parents should expect (a) to be called together periodically during the next 4 years and (b) to periodically be given objective data that enable them to test, with their children, the continued reality of the earlier developed career plan. In addition, parents would be expected to help expose their children to different types of jobs and postsecondary opportunities and to be understanding, patient, and willing to consider alternatives their child may express an interest in.

Two points need to be stressed when providing parents with information about their child's academic progress in relation to the ICP. The first point is the issue of providing objective data. There is quite a difference between a guidance counselor (a) telling a parent that his or her daughter is not "college material" and pointing out that her cumulative average and SAT test score do not compare favorably with those of successful college students and (b) telling parents about educational alternatives that may meet the adolescent's goals more effectively. Announcing that a child is not college material can have a personal pejorative connotation. The second method relays the same information but does so more objectively. Parents—particularly parents of those in the academic middle, the "anxious class"—can be expected to hold high hopes that their children will obtain 4-year degrees. They will respond best to objective data and positive alternatives.

The second point is that clearly defining the roles for parents and schools will facilitate the delivery of objective data and thus make high school educators more willing to provide it and parents more open to accept it. The school's purpose is to provide parents with feedback regarding the appropriateness of their child's "tentative career plan," the program of study they have chosen, and the courses they are selecting. The school will help parents evaluate these data "if they wish." This critical message should be delivered to eighth-grade parents: "We want you to be involved in the formulation of your child's tentative career plan. We will at specific times provide you with data to test the continued reality of this plan. We will help you evaluate this information if you wish, but we are not here to make the decision for you. It is your choice." After all, because parents make the decision, they will have to live with it; but they have

a right to expect the school to provide the guidance and data needed to make a sound one.

The basis for this strategy is a "compact" between parents and school. Prior to the 1970s, high school teachers and guidance counselors took a very directive role in student programs of study and course-taking decisions. In the late 1970s and the 1980s, the pendulum swung the other way: The shopping mall high school emerged, students and parents made all decisions, and the schools stopped providing specific course-planning direction. Youth thus received little to no satisfactory guidance. A compromise could resolve this situation. A compact between the school and the parents would require the provision of highly structured guidance through objective data and counseling; the presence of these elements would help parents and students make informed decisions.

Step 2: Involve Parents in the Career Plan

We argued earlier that creating *other ways to win* begins with more effective systematic career guidance. The focal point of this effort was an ICP for each student. This plan may best be formulated before a student enters high school, but some formal review process or development of this plan for each student should occur in the first semester of the freshman year of high school, if it has not already occurred. This plan should represent a joint effort or decisions by each student and his or her parents. If nothing else, parents should approve the plan. This process may sound bureaucratic, but human nature being what it is, people tend to take something they sign a little more seriously. Any number of other things can be done to involve parents, such as sending them periodic reminders about their child's plan. Whatever efforts are expended, the objective is to get parents to take responsibility for systematic collaboration with their children in this planning and to get them to confront the facts.

Step 3: Provide Objective Feedback at Strategic Times

Parents need to be involved not only in the development of their child's ICP but also in the periodic reality testing of this plan as their

child's academic credentials evolve during 4 years of high school. National survey data (NELS 88) reveal that current first "tentative career plans" of 80% or more of students will include pursuit of a degree from a 4-year college or university. Other national data also show that, on average, only about 30% of high school students will graduate with credentials that suggest this path is a good idea. The objective of the third step in the parent involvement plan is to provide data that give parents and students the opportunity to test the reality of the 4-year degree plan and that permit them to alter plans, if necessary.

The types of feedback that can be provided to parents include test results; course grades in strategic courses, such as math, science, and foreign languages; and PSAT, SAT, and ACT test results. The key is to relate the data to the child's tentative career plan. A report card performs one function, but a report card with a note from a school staff member suggesting that a child's performance is inconsistent with his or her tentative career plan is a much better wake-up call. This type of feedback is most effective when delivered at key points in a student's high school career, particularly at the end of the sophomore and juniors years. In some cases, key pieces of objective data, such as PSAT scores or SAT scores, arrive in the spring of the junior year—an excellent time for a review of ICPs.

Step 4: Provide Opportunities for Individual Assistance

The final step in the plan to involve parents in the secondary and postsecondary planning process is simple: Provide parents with the option of individual advising from guidance staff or teachers. Every piece of correspondence and every meeting with parents should end with instructions for contacting the school for "individual attention." Of course, this proviso also means that counselors must be available at night and on Saturdays on a rotating basis because today the parent who does not work during the school day is the exception. It would be nice to think that the response will be so overwhelming that not enough staff will be on hand to handle the requests. Realistically, however, this probably will not happen. Nonetheless, the option should always be present, and as efforts to create *other ways to win* begin to pay off, responses will increase and guidance staff can begin to do more of what they were trained to do in the first place.

Messages for Parents

In each of the four steps of the parental involvement plan, the five points that are considered before making decisions about attending a 4-year college (see Chapter 7) need to be delivered and reinforced. In addition, the following three messages should be communicated to all parents so that they focus on the real issues or considerations, not on the myths that emanate from the media.

Focus on Postsecondary Success, Not on College Admissions

Parents who graduated from college during a time when admission was relatively competitive may consider the concern for ability to do college work over successful admission to college to be heresy. At first, they may not understand this message. They may assume, naively, that college acceptance implies the admitted can do college-level work. The reader should know better by now. Although getting into a "college of choice" may not be guaranteed, getting into "some college" is guaranteed. The real issue, then, is not admissions, but graduation.

If the Goal Is a Better Job, Then Do Not Confuse Education With Occupational Skills

When working with parents, particularly if the objective is to motivate the parents of students in the academic middle to consider *other ways to win*, it is important as well as effective to stress the earlier referenced five points before the decision is made to pursue a 4-year college degree. Thus, this message is important for all parents. The ranks of underemployed college graduates include many very bright graduates who got baccalaureate degrees but not in a major whose skills equate with demand in the labor force. Remember this point: High earnings are a reward for skills in demand. The demand for workers with skills learned at the baccalaureate degree level is much too low to accommodate the 1.3 million who graduate each year. At best, 1 in 3 will be underemployed. The path to economic security requires individuals to obtain skills that are in demand and necessary

for many technical high skill/high wage jobs. Many of these skills can be gained both in school-to-career programs and in 2-year post-secondary technical programs. Some parents may counter that a better job is not the most important reason for getting a degree. This is true for some; these individuals need not be concerned with gaining skills. For the rest—national survey data suggest 87%—whose goal is a better job, gaining skills should be important. If such students are determined to go to college, they should ask themselves this question: What majors will result in skills that will keep me from joining the ranks of the underemployed?

Know the Odds and Know the Costs

Perhaps the message that parents and students need most to hear is also the most difficult to deliver; namely, among those who try baccalaureate education, losers outnumber winners. Only about one half graduate in less than 6 years. Among those who do, one third to one half end up in jobs they could have gotten without a college degree. Because no one wants to deliver the bad news, it is easier to look the other way. But students and parents deserve to know. Another point that should be kept in mind: Although some surprises are inevitable, odds are that the poorer a student's academic credentials, the greater the likelihood that he or she will end up a statistic in the losing column. Parents and students can no longer count on colleges to deliver the bad news through rejection letters. In these times of excess higher education capacity, one can be sure that colleges will be the last to deliver the message. The high schools have to handle this task.

Other Ways to Win

In this chapter, we outlined the first step that high school faculty need to take to create *other ways to win* for those in the academic middle. We argued that such efforts begin with a systematic career guidance plan that includes an ICP for each student; the ICPs require systematic parental input. The goal of such efforts is to increase the

career maturity level of all students, but particularly that of students for whom the *one way to win* scenario is not realistic. This program has a particularly important reason to exist: Without it, students will not take seriously the academic emphases created within the college prep program to facilitate success in alternative postsecondary routes. A description of these proposed new emphases begins in Chapter 9.

9

Step 2

Redesigning College Prep for All Students

In the United States, the abrupt cut-off that comes after high school graduation leaves a great many adolescents floundering, vaguely hoping for the best.

E. Herr and S. Cramer (1994), p. 8

The second step in creating graduation alternatives for high school students is to redesign the college prep program of study to make it more responsive to the growing percentage of students who enroll in it. Why redesign college prep? Because the preponderance of evidence suggests that the traditional college prep program is not instructionally effective for two thirds of the students currently enrolled in it, particularly those from the academic middle. Lacking any indication that this latter group of students will lose interest in higher education and stop taking college prep courses, high school educators really have only one choice: Redesign the program of study. Thus, we offer alternative methods of creating *other ways to win*. These include developing parallel alternatives within college prep and organizing to provide postsecondary placement services to all students, not just those bound for 4-year colleges. These parallel programs will differ in the

postsecondary alternatives they are designed to prepare students for. Differing instructional modalities for use within these emphases are outlined in Chapter 10.

SECTION I

The Current Status of the College Prep Program

Prior to the 1970s, the college prep curriculum in U.S. high schools was a highly structured sequence of courses offering limited course selection options. Since the 1970s, this structure has largely faded away. The reasons for this ebb are many and varied, including the development of a "supermarket" array of options and a matching philosophy toward high school course offerings. This trend has been accompanied by a corresponding liberalization (some say decline) of admission standards at all but roughly 250 competitive colleges and universities.

In the past, completion of a college prep program of study was required for a student to be recommended by his or her high school for college admission and necessitated 4 years of specific college prep English, 3 years of college prep math, 2 years of college prep laboratory science, and 2 years of the same foreign language. This requirement is no longer applicable. Now, the typical high school program selection book begins with the words, "The following courses are 'recommended' " and then offers an amazing array of courses. Some of these are advanced, some regular, some remedial, some politically correct, and some designed to attract more students to a particular academic department. Importantly, even within content areas such as English or math, little or no effort is made to articulate or ensure sequential skill development among the many course offerings.

> Our point here is that reengineering the college prep program of study does not mean dismantling a highly structured program of study, but instead requires putting some structure into a highly unstructured activity.

Also, it should be noted that high school educators have already bifurcated or created different emphases within the college preparatory

program of study. Virtually all high schools have an honors program for the academically blessed, with very specific, demanding, and competitive courses. Meanwhile, those who need structure the most—namely, the academically average students—dabble here and there in a highly unstructured, undemanding, and noncompetitive environment.

These honors programs hold an important key to creating *other ways to win* for those in the academic middle. First, the honors programs that exist in most high schools may be found under the overall rubric of college prep. In higher education terminology, they are a special emphasis within the college prep program of study. Thus, the first step in creating alternative emphases within the college prep program has already been taken and paves the way for additional emphasis to be developed. Second, this honors emphasis is centered around a unique focus; everything about it is aimed at preparing those enrolled to be competitive in making the transition from high school to selective colleges and universities. Thus, the honors program is unique, not just because the academically blessed are there, but because the emphasis itself has a specific transition goal.

It is proposed that the precedent of developing a unique emphasis within the college prep program aimed at unique transitional goals, pioneered through the development of an honors curriculum, be continued by adding other emphases aimed at preparing other college prep students for different transitional goals.

A Proposal for the Redesign of College Prep

Building on the example of the honors emphasis that currently exists within most high school college prep programs of study, we propose that the program be reengineered to add other emphases for students who aspire to different types of higher education. A schematic design is provided in Figure 9.1.

The proposed design has three phases: (a) a common core of academic courses for all students in the 9th and 10th grades, (b) four different transitional emphases in the 10th and 11th grades, and (c) transitional postsecondary placement services in the 12th grade.

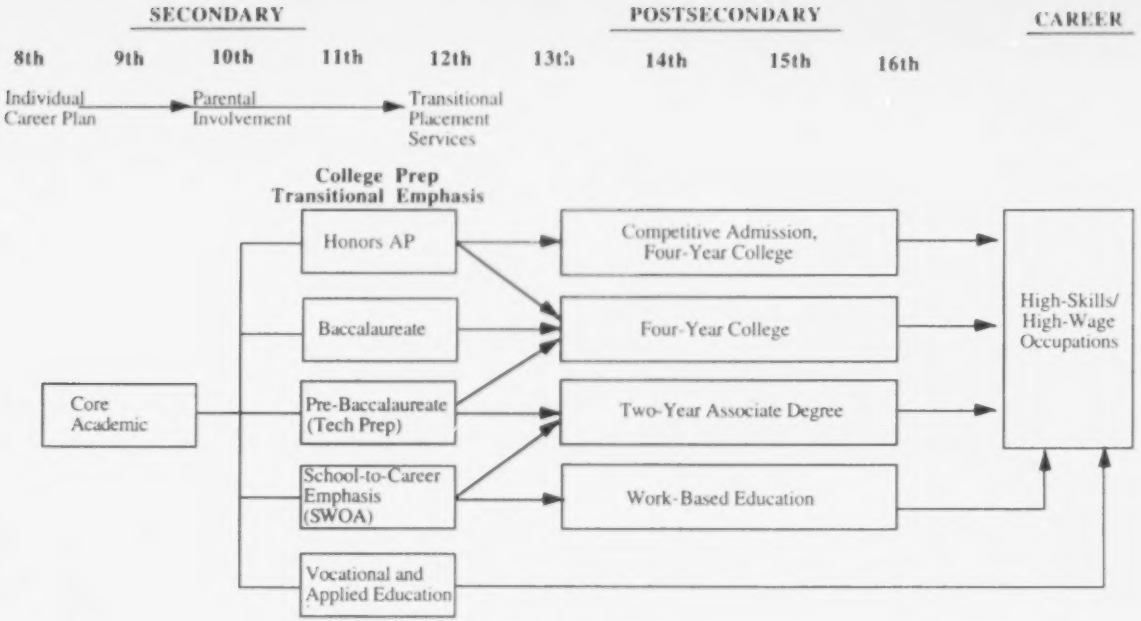


Figure 9.1. College Prep Redesign

Phase 1: Core Academics

The core academic component is best viewed as a common academic curriculum approach recommended by numerous educational reform reports. All 9th graders whose individual career plans (ICPs) include postsecondary education take a specific set of prescribed academics that includes English (with an emphasis on reading for comprehension and writing), traditional college-level math (algebra, geometry, or more advanced courses for those able to take them), science (including laboratory biology), and at least 1 year of foreign language (the second year being completed by 11th grade). This freshman and sophomore year experience not only forms the academic basis for the last 2 years of high school but, equally important, also provides objective academic performance data that students and parents can use to make decisions about the emphases to complete in the 10th and 11th grades.

Regardless of the postsecondary plans actually pursued, requiring this strong academic program in the 9th and 10th grades will prove beneficial. Strong basic academic, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills have been identified by the U.S. Department of Labor's SCANS report (1991) and numerous others as prerequisites for success in any type of high skill/high wage work.

Phase 2: Transitional Emphasis

In the 11th grade, students must select one of four transitional emphases within the college prep curriculum. One of the four already exists: honors/advanced placement (AP). Another exists by default—namely, the largely unstructured, relatively undemanding college prep course taken by those who are not qualified for the honors/AP program. We call this second emphasis the "baccalaureate emphasis." Two other emphases should be added officially. The first is a pre-baccalaureate or tech prep emphasis design that will prepare students academically and technically for success in 1- or 2-year postsecondary education programs that lead to high skill/high wage careers. The second is a school-to-career option design that prepares students academically for formal work-based training programs and part-time postsecondary education. Each of these emphases is described later. Importantly, whereas the honors and baccalaureate emphases are comprised exclusively of academic courses, the other

two emphases include technical skill instruction and possibly some work-based learning in the 11th and 12th grades.

Phase 3: Transitional Placement Services

The final component of a redesigned college prep program of study is the provision of placement services to all students. Thus, services for those going to 2-year technical colleges, work-based learning programs, or regular employment will be identical to those already provided for students applying to competitive colleges. This placement effort should be viewed as the culminating activity within the systematic career guidance program recommended, as well as the implementation of the ICP recommended in Chapter 8. Although placement is now traditionally viewed as a guidance function, a look at the ratio of counselors to students reveals that this point of view is impractical. Thus, placement of the graduating class must be the responsibility of the entire staff. Everyone on the faculty knows something about a service or option that could assist in placement. Everyone must pitch in.

These three components are offered to reengineer the college prep program of study. This proposal is admittedly a departure from the current shopping mall philosophy. In fact, it is quite directive. In the first 2 years of high school, students are given little latitude. As discussed in Chapter 8, if their ICPs call for a higher education degree, the program of study will be college prep. The only latitude will be in the different courses for students who enter the ninth grade with more advanced math, science, and foreign language skills and in social studies and other electives.

Student performance in the first 2 years will be used in conferences with parents about the selection of an emphasis for the last 2 years of high school. The administration in each high school in each community must decide how directive it wishes to be regarding the election and completion of an emphasis. Many may worry about parents' reactions to a more directive, prescriptive approach to high school course selection.

Parental Acceptance

After years of allowing students to select courses without regard for need, high school educators may be leery of parents' reactions to

a more structured program of study. Recent studies suggest, however, that the public actually is looking for a much more structured high school program of study. In a poll reported in *Education Week* (Walsch, 1994), 84% of parents polled believed that high schools should be more prescriptive; many thought that students who had not mastered basic skills should not graduate. Still, change will not be easy: Parents are anxious about the future of their children, and the *one way to win* mentality is deep-rooted. These are among the reasons that recommendations for creating *other ways to win* started with career guidance for students and help with higher education planning for parents. Yet, the costs of higher education and the increasing number of reports about underemployed college graduates are making everyone more receptive to a new message. Parents want more structure in the schooling of their children. A highly structured 9th- and 10th-grade academic program and 11th- and 12th-grade transitional emphasis, which are required in order to be recommended to a postsecondary institution, are a response to this concern.

Two New Transitional Emphases Within College Prep

We propose the addition of two new transitional emphases to the existing two (honors and regular or baccalaureate) that officially or unofficially exist within the traditional college prep program of study. The intent of both is to prepare students from the academic middle for transitions into settings in which they can learn skills that are prerequisites to competing for high skill/high wage jobs that do not require a baccalaureate degree. The two emphases differ with regard to the settings in which graduates will learn these skills. One is a postsecondary technical education emphasis (pre-baccalaureate) designed to prepare students for success in 1- and 2-year technical education postsecondary education programs. The second (school to career) is a work-site emphasis involving a combination of employer-provided formal training programs with part-time pre-baccalaureate postsecondary technical education. These two approaches are the two basic alternatives for those in the academic middle; the first is associated with the federal tech prep movement, and the second is

associated with the federal school-to-work initiative. Each of these two approaches is discussed below.

The Pre-Baccalaureate Emphasis (Tech Prep)

The pre-baccalaureate emphasis is an old idea whose time has come. It is a variation or refinement of the concept of the 2 plus 2 or 2 years of high school education that lead to 2 additional years of postsecondary education concept. The emphasis goal is to motivate and prepare high school juniors and seniors to successfully pursue 1- and 2-year programs of postsecondary technical education. These programs are cooperative efforts of high schools and postsecondary technical educational providers. A schematic of tech prep programs is presented in the box.

Pre-Baccalaureate (Tech Prep) Emphasis

High school *10th & 11th grades*		*Postsecondary* *Technical* *Education*
Focused academics Related technical education	Formal articulation agreements	1- and 2-year technical programs

Typically, tech prep programs are organized around specific occupational clusters or majors. For example, a health occupations cluster or major would be designed to prepare students for a transition to a variety of postsecondary 1- and 2-year technical programs in the health field. The key element is the articulation agreement.

The Articulation Agreement

The most important element in the tech prep transition program is the articulation agreement that formally links high schools with postsecondary technical education providers. These agreements form the basis both for organizing the junior and senior year academic and technical education component and for identifying the "perks" or benefits to be accrued by students who participate in the program. The agreements specify three things: (a) what academic and technical

competencies students are expected to have mastered in high school to be admitted and successful in the specified postsecondary program or programs, (b) how these competencies will be assessed by the postsecondary provider, and (c) what benefits will accrue to graduates who have these competencies.

For example, an articulation agreement related to an associate degree in architectural engineering would specify math and science competencies; adequate computer skills, including familiarity with computer-assisted drafting; and other academic requirements that form the academic focus of the junior and senior year academic and technical program of study. The agreement would then state how these competencies will be assessed. Often, this assessment is accomplished through course grades. A better approach, however, is some type of more formal assessment, such as portfolio or performance skill assessment, that leads to a clear message to students and parents regarding readiness to pursue this postsecondary option. Finally, the agreement specifies the benefit to be gained by students after participating in this transitional emphasis. That last item is the key to everything.

Motivating Students to Participate

Although much has been written about the merits of tech prep programs, little has been said about students' reasons for taking them. Yet, high school educators know that this is the key issue. Why would students and parents choose this program over the baccalaureate emphasis within the college prep program? Improved systematic career guidance that includes an ICP, programs of postsecondary planning and counseling for parents, and objective data regarding each student's academic performance will go a long way toward motivating students, particularly those in the academic middle, to elect this option. Additional incentives also will help.

Incentives for students to participate in pre-baccalaureate emphasis take three basic forms: (a) advanced standing, (b) advanced standing with time shortened, and (c) preferred admissions. The first allows students to enter the postsecondary technical program with advanced standing; certain courses normally required are waived. These courses are often in the technical area—thus the importance of opportunities for vocational technical education course work in the

junior and senior year academic program. This advanced standing leaves open the second incentive, shortened time, which means that the postsecondary program of study will take less time and fewer tuition dollars to complete. Postsecondary providers are not always willing to negotiate such time-shortened options. Students still benefit, however, from the opportunity to take more advanced courses or additional electives for the price of a standard certificate or degree.

Another powerful incentive emerges when admissions to relevant postsecondary programs are competitive. Programs in certain 2-year technical health occupations that typically turn students away are a good example. In these cases, students who complete the technical education emphasis and meet the expected competencies are given admission preference. A final incentive is an arrangement in which those who meet certain academic and technical education standards in their junior year and first semester of their senior year are allowed to begin their certificate or associate degree program as college students during their last semester in high school. Obviously, this option is not possible in many local high schools, but when possible, it is a very powerful motivator and is popular with parents.

Regardless of the incentive outlined in the articulation agreement, the essential point is to be able to demonstrate to parents and students clear advantages to participating in these prebaccalaureate or tech prep transition emphases. This is why so much importance is attached to a written, formal articulation agreement. Experience with tech prep transitional programs across the United States has shown that the credibility of such a program increases dramatically with both students and parents when it is viewed as jointly sponsored by the high school and one or more postsecondary institutions. In some cases, the specific incentive will be preferred admission; in others, it is the promise of a degree for less money or a better degree for the same amount of money. Of course, these emphases have one other benefit: some likelihood of academic success.

The Transitional Academic Program

Whereas the linchpin of tech prep programs is the articulation agreement, the heart of these programs is the focused academic

course work that takes place in the junior and senior years. The content and skill levels for this curriculum are dictated by the articulation agreement. Recommendations for these courses are discussed in Chapter 10. It should be emphasized that most of this course work will not require the addition of many new courses, but rather the redesigning of courses that already exist. Remember that because these students are already in the college prep program of study, they will be taking math and science in their junior year and—as recommended in Chapter 10—should be taking math and science in their senior year as well. The obvious need here is for a refocusing of the courses already being offered. One possible exception is science courses. Typically, very few high school students take physics or advanced biology, yet all students in these technical emphases will need one or the other. The problem is that these students do not need the same physics or biology courses that will be needed by students preparing for a 4-year engineering or biology degree. In cases like these, new courses will need to be developed.

The School-to-Career Emphasis

The final emphasis within the college prep program is designed to prepare students for a too-often-forgotten place in which to learn skills associated with high skill/high wage work—namely, formal training programs that take place on the job. This emphasis is not the vocational education of old in a new wrapper. Whereas the outcome goal of traditional vocational education was to teach skills that were prerequisites to entry-level employment in a variety of blue-collar technical fields, the intent of the work-based learning option is transition to a formal training program sponsored by either industry or workers' organizations. The spirit of this emphasis is embodied in the 1994 federal School to Work Opportunity Act (SWOA) and its emphasis on a combined experience of postsecondary education and work-based learning. Although the target group of this act originally was not academically average youth in the college prep program, but rather low-achieving at-risk youth (Hudelson, 1994), it has come to be viewed as a very good option for some of those currently floundering in the college prep programs in U.S. high schools. Thus, a look at some of the provisions of this act helps clarify how to create a workplace learning emphasis within the college prep program.

School-to-Career Emphasis

High School	*Connecting Activities 11th & 12th Grades*	*Postsecondary Career*
Focused academics High school technical courses Work-based learning experiences	School/industry compacts	Formal employer or employee-sponsored-based training programs and part-time postsecondary technical education

The School to Work Opportunity Act

The intent, as indicated by the language in the SWOA itself, is "to improve the knowledge and skills of youth by integrating academic and occupational learning, integrating school-based and work-based learning, and building effective linkages between secondary and postsecondary education" and to create "a universal high-quality school-to-work transition system that enables youth in the United States to identify and navigate paths to productive and progressively more rewarding roles in the workplace." An emphasis is placed on using "workplaces as active learning environments in the educational process by making employers joint partners with educators in providing opportunities for all students to participate in high-quality work-based learning experiences." This work-based learning modality is most appropriate for those whose ICP, called career major in the SWOA, is aimed at high skill/high wage occupations for which the prerequisite skills can be learned in formal work-based programs.

The SWOA outlines three types of activities: school-based learning, work-based learning, and connecting activities. In the redesign of the college prep program described previously, the school-based learning would be accomplished through the common 9th- and 10th-grade experience and focused 11th- and 12th-grade experience.

The school-to-career emphasis has two unique features: (a) During their final years in high school, students will begin to participate in a work-site learning program on the job; and (b) after they graduate, they continue that program as a full-time employee. Participants also attend 1- or 2-year postsecondary technical education institu-

tions on a part-time basis, often at employer expense. Prior to the work-based learning in the 11th or 12th grades, most employers require that students have relevant introductory technical training, including relevant safety instruction. Both of these are typically provided via high school vocational education programs, as is discussed below. To accomplish this work-based learning, schools will have to develop various "connecting activities," such as the formulation of school/industry compacts to develop work-based learning sites or provision of assistance to on-the-job trainers in such areas as instructional techniques. Many high school staff are already certified in cooperative education; they can lead these efforts. In fact, this emphasis can be conceptualized as a type of cooperative education program (not to be confused with cooperative or group learning techniques) for a different student cohort.

There are numerous examples of effective school-to-career programs. The Pro-Tech program in Boston is one such example. In the final 2 years of high school, students spend a good part of the school week in Boston health care facilities in work-based learning experiences. If they are successful in the program, they transition to full-time employment at these sites after graduation and continue their training as part of the facility's ongoing staff development effort. In addition, many attend community college part-time. The essential feature of this and similar programs is that, in the final 2 years of high school, students retain the status of full-time high school student but much of their education takes place on the job. Thus, after they graduate, the transition to full-time employment is almost seamless.

Apprenticeships

Arguably the best school-to-career opportunity that can be arranged by a school is the transition to a registered apprenticeship program. Registered apprenticeships (endorsed and regulated by either the federal or state departments of labor) are run by both employers and workers' groups and almost without exception are in high skill/high wage occupations. An important and often misunderstood element in the success of such programs is that they require a relatively high level of academic ability, including reading for comprehension, computational skills, and problem solving by using science principles. This reality led a RAND study of the apprentice-

ship to conclude that the most promising prospects for these programs were students who "enter postsecondary education directly after high school but never obtain a degree" (Finegold, 1993, p. 5). This is exactly the group we have argued would benefit from the creation of *other ways to win*.

Unfortunately, the availability of registered apprenticeship programs varies dramatically across the United States. As a result, this option for school-to-career programs may not be available in all communities. Where they do exist, they are one of the best roads to high skill/high wage work.

Motivating Students to Participate

Why would a college prep student even consider a school-to-career option? At first, it seems highly unlikely. Remember, however, that a percentage of academically average students, even when they take a college prep program, go to work rather than to college, after graduation. They may do so after realistically considering their motivation, academic skills, and the costs involved in attending college. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when these students make the decision not to go to college, but the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study (Gray et al., 1993) found that students from the academic middle who took a college prep program but who went to work instead of to college were already working part-time 20 hours per week while in high school. Thus, it is highly likely that they will begin developing strong connections to the workplace about the same time they could legally work, which for most is also about the time they start their junior year. Viewed from this perspective, it seems very likely that, during their junior year certainly by the beginning of their senior year, some college prep students have already, no doubt quietly, opted for employment, not college. Although these students may be unwilling to enroll in a concentrated vocational education program and thus lose face, they would be interested in and certainly would benefit from a school-to-career option within college prep.

Also, it is important to remember that many employers who offer these formal training programs also provide tuition reimbursement for relevant postsecondary education courses that lead to a degree. Thus, a student can participate in a paid formal training program and go to college part-time at no net expense; this would be strong incentive for some students and parents.

Finally, it is well to keep in mind that many students decide early on, for a variety of reasons, to continue their education part-time while working full-time. Typically, however, they end up working in dead-end jobs for low wages. The school-to-career option offers a decidedly better opportunity for this group of students in that it allows them to go to school part-time but also to begin a high skill/high wage career, instead of earning minimum wage.

Postsecondary Placement Services for All

The third component and final phase of a redesigned college prep program of study is a commitment and (re)organization of staff to provide transitional postsecondary placement services for all students, not just to those applying to competitive colleges. This assistance for all students clearly does not happen now. In fact, all too often, many of those in the academic middle never talk with a guidance counselor during their entire 4 years in high school. In all fairness, high school guidance counselors give help to all who ask. The problem is that neither those in the middle nor their parents ask for it. Thus, in too many cases, counselors with huge client loads take an "I am here if you need me" approach. The academically blessed—those who need help the least—show up for services; the unblessed do not. This dichotomy should no longer be acceptable. Creating *other ways to win* requires a commitment to provide structured postsecondary placement services to all students, regardless of program of study or postsecondary goals.

The transitional placement commitment begins with a caseload philosophy. This means that the faculty view the entire senior class as needing directive placement assistance and organize to provide these services. Schools can be organized in a variety of ways to do this, but in most cases guidance counselors cannot do it all. Another approach, then, is the placement team approach. The senior class is divided into groups, and teams of faculty/administrators/paraprofessionals/anyone else working in the building are formed. Each team is assigned responsibility for a student group. In such an effort, a guidance counselor can be assigned to each group to provide postsecondary planning expertise. The placement team's job is to provide significant individual attention and individual help in mak-

ing a successful transition from school to postsecondary education or career.

A comprehensive postsecondary placement effort by high schools that aggressively seeks out all students and offer help is very important in the creation of *other ways to win* for those in the academic middle. Many of these students do not get as much direction from home or have the range of role models available as do their more academically blessed peers; thus, they flounder. Instituting a systematic career guidance program that centers around ICPs for all students will help, but a large dose of individual attention for each student by a member of the high school faculty, particularly during the senior year, would do a world of good to ensure that those in the invisible middle make a successful transition from high school.

SECTION II

The New Role of High School Vocational/Technical Education

The focus of creating *other ways to win* has been on reengineering the college prep program of study. The rationale for this focus is that this program includes many of the academically average youth. Unless something catastrophic happens, it is unlikely that this trend will be reversed. What does this mean for vocational education, and what about those students who go to work instead of college? Although as important as ever, like college prep, vocational education will need to be reengineered to accommodate a new role—preparation for 2-year technical education—while maintaining its traditional role—preparation for full-time employment.

The continued importance and future role of high school vocational and applied education is perhaps best illustrated by its prominent role in the SWOA. Although the title of the act (School to Work Opportunity Act) suggests that its purpose is to facilitate the transition from high school to work, closer examination of its provisions suggests it could have been called the School to Career Opportunity Act because it requires programs to have educational components that include both secondary and postsecondary technical education. The important point is that the drafters of the bill recognized the importance of vocational technical education at the high school level

as a prerequisite for success in 1- and 2-year postsecondary technical education.

Furthermore, transitional emphasis within the college prep curriculum that has a technical education component has one other important advantage: It provides some fallback skills for those who go to work instead of to higher education. A rather consistent 20% of high school graduates enter the labor force each year. In times past, a majority of those who went to work would have participated in vocational education programs such as business education, vocational agriculture, or trade and industrial education. Having concentrated in vocational education and been aided in job placement assistance by vocational education teachers, these students made an orderly transition from school to work. Most had jobs before they graduated, and most jobs offered full-time employment with benefits.

Today, many of the students who in the past would have taken vocational education now dabble in the college prep program but do not go on to higher education; instead, they seek regular employment. As revealed by the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study (Gray et al., 1993), most of these students got minimum-wage jobs in retailing and food service; they were not prepared to compete for entry-level high skill/high wage work because they had no skills. If they had taken a transitional emphasis within the college prep program of study that included some technical education, they would have had basic occupational skills to be competitive for some types of high skill/high wage employment when they decided not to continue their education. Thus, the two additional transitional emphases—pre-baccalaureate and school-to-career—that should be added to the college prep program of study must include some technical education.

Vocational education, therefore, does have an important place in the high school curriculum. However, the mission of vocational education will, in the proposed model, be expanded from concentration in course work that will prepare students for full-time employment on graduation (this will continue to be important for some students) to a curriculum that offers shorter semester courses for college prep students who choose a transitional emphasis design to prepare them for postsecondary pre-baccalaureate technical education or work-site school-to-career options.

Also, it should be noted that some students will still need traditional vocational education. The large and growing percentage of students with special needs who take a concentration in vocational

education proves the continuing need for a program of study designed to prepare students for full-time employment on graduation.

For most students, however, vocational education offerings will provide the background technical skills needed to increase the probability of success in postsecondary technical education and even baccalaureate-level education. A case in point involves high school business education courses. Some students will continue to take the 3-year business education sequence of skills courses in preparation for entry into the workforce after graduation. Even greater numbers will take business education courses, because they provide essential skills such as keyboarding and word processing for all those who are college-bound, and accounting and spreadsheet courses that are important for those with aspirations toward employment in business or engineering. Another example is high school vocational education drafting programs: Some students will take this vocational sequence in preparation for full-time employment as drafters (because many are still hired directly from high school). Most in this curriculum, however, will actually be preparing themselves for certain types of postsecondary education, such as engineering and architecture, wherein computer-assisted drafting skills will have to be mastered. A final example is high school health occupations: Some students will take the full course sequence in preparation for full-time employment as paraprofessionals in the health field. Other students with aspirations toward a postsecondary education in the health fields will take health occupations single-semester courses designed to prepare them for prebaccalaureate or baccalaureate education.

In essence, then, the creation of *other ways to win* does not diminish, but in fact increases, the value of a strong high school vocational technical education component. Such a program does three important things. First, it provides a relevant program of study for those who are work-bound. Second, it provides an important source of technical skill training that is a prerequisite to successful 2-year technical education programs and that provides a fallback for those in the academic middle who take college prep but go directly to work after graduation. Third, many vocational technical programs provide important opportunities to learn specialized skills needed by the 2- and 4-year college-bound. Thus, a viable vocational education integrated into the comprehensive high school curriculum is a necessary element in creating *other ways to win*. In high schools that do not have access to vocational education, other appropriate alternatives can

often be developed within technology education and home economics and in the community.

Other Ways to Win

In this chapter, we argued that because the majority of high school students take a college prep curriculum, creating *other ways to win* requires that this curriculum be redesigned to be more effective for the diverse student cohort now enrolled in it. Building on the reality that this program of study has already been bifurcated into honors and nonhonors, we recommended that two additional emphases be added. One (pre-baccalaureate/tech prep) prepares students for 2-year technical education; the other (school to career) prepares them for work-based formal training and part-time postsecondary education. The goal of these emphases is to effectively educate those enrolled so that they will be academically successful in whatever postsecondary pursuit they choose. In many cases, new courses will not be needed, but it is clear that teaching and scheduling them in the same old way will not work. Furthermore, the educational modalities by which academically average youth learn best are often different from those most effective with the learning styles of the academically blessed. This situation is discussed in Chapter 10. We also argue in Chapter 10 that if these students are to become more involved in these new options, high school faculty and administrators must stop treating them as second-class students.

10

Step 3

Ensuring Equal Status and Focused Academics

The Strength of the Wolf Lies in the Pack.
Rudyard Kipling,
The Law of the Jungle (1865-1936)

Those in the academic middle feel about high school the way second- and third-string athletes feel about filling out the roster, serving as the competition in practice, or riding the bench: Technically, they are part of the team and must dutifully show up for practice, but their real involvement is minimal and subservient. Their major role is to be spectators in uniform. They get little or no attention from the coaches and often are treated as unwelcome baggage.

This same role is played by the majority of high school students who make up the academic middle. They are enrolled, come to school, and attend class most of the time, but they are there in body only. Their real engagement in the curriculum is nil. They are passive to the point of being almost invisible. Some people would argue that this "invisibility" is their fault, but considering the amount of attention they receive from high school staff (typically none), who can be surprised at their passiveness? The way they act mirrors the way they

are treated. When they do manage to get someone's attention in school, the treatment they get differs considerably from that given to their more gifted peers. The academically blessed are treated by teachers as future peers; the less blessed are treated as future subordinates and, in many ways, inferior. This culture must change if high schools are to become more effective for those from the academic middle.

Often, relatively little effort is made in the high school classroom to reach those students who populate the academic middle. Just having to teach these students is considered by some to be "hardship duty"; status among high school teachers comes from teaching honors and AP courses. Even though a majority of those in the academic middle now take so-called college prep courses, these courses are still taught in the same modalities as when only the academically blessed took them. The attitude seems to be, "OK, if you want to take these courses, we cannot stop you; but if you don't learn, it's your fault, not mine." Likewise, few teachers make much of an effort to motivate these students whom they now find taking their college prep classes. Both of these situations must change if high schools are to become more effective for those from the academic middle.

In the previous chapter, we outlined a plan that would redesign the college prep curriculum to better meet the postsecondary transitional needs of those who now enroll. In this chapter, we discuss three other fundamental aspects of this reform: (a) the need to change the culture of high schools to increase academic expectations for students who make up the academic middle, as well as the amount of time, energy, and personal attention they receive from the faculty, a process we call "ending Taylorism"; (b) the need to modify the overall educational modalities by which these students are taught in order to increase learning; and (c) the need to make renewed efforts to motivate and challenge this generally uninvolved cohort.

SECTION I

Putting an End to Taylorism

It is very unlikely that academically average students will be more engaged in the high school curriculum unless they feel more a part, a more valued part, of school itself. To use an analogy, although

multitudes may dutifully show up at church on Sunday, only those who feel like a real part of things show up at the potluck suppers and other church functions; those who feel like an unwelcome or unimportant part of the congregation will generally stay uninvolved. Those in the academic middle share this feeling. Thus, if the goal is to transform these youth from spectators of the academic process to active participants, they will need to feel important. Presently, they are treated as unimportant and inferior. If educators want to make them distinctive, they must be treated as distinctive.

As part of the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study (Gray et al., 1993), the researchers sought to determine the degree of alienation of those in the academic middle. Scant actual evidence of alienation was found, but when these youth were asked whether "some students were treated better by the faculty than others," 84% said yes. Interestingly enough, this double standard was not missed by the more academically blessed either; 75% of the most academically successful students also observed that some students were treated better than others.

Most readers can simply recall their own high school experience to verify the dual standards or differing treatment of students, depending on their status among staff. Some students, the academically blessed, and certain athletes could roam the halls at will, unquestioned, whereas the mere sight of others in the hall was enough for a teacher to call the office. Nothing has changed; high school still has a double standard. This dual standard is not necessarily the result of a widespread pejorative attitude toward those in the middle, although undoubtedly some of this exists among some staff. Instead, it stems from an ideology held by teachers about children and the role of the school. It is most reminiscent of a set of beliefs called Taylorism (with a little bit of social Darwinism thrown in).

Defining Taylorism

Although students may be taught in school that the United States is founded on the principle that all are created equal, they learn in school, particularly in high school, that apparently some of their peers are more equal than others. In every high school in the United States there is a predictable "in crowd"—those anointed and honored by teachers, school administrators, school boards, and school policies.

Predictably, they are mostly the academically blessed, although some with special athletic prowess or well-connected parents may join the ranks. The important point is that most high school educators take this situation as perfectly natural and even desirable because of 90 plus years of Taylorist influence on the schools.

Although Frederick Taylor (1856-1915), the father of scientific management, was a proponent of close cooperation between workers and managers, his theories of organizing for efficiency were interpreted differently. In brief, managers were to assume "all burden of gathering the traditional knowledge which in the past had been possessed by the workmen" (1911, p. 83). Thus, in the Taylorist model, the importance of managers increased dramatically and suggested that only those of high intellect were capable of assuming this role. Meanwhile, the level of intellect needed by the worker diminished significantly; in fact, the Taylorist model suggested that the fewer decisions the workers had to make, the better. The important thing was that they learn to do as they were told. The bottom line, from the Taylorist frame of reference, was that the academically blessed were destined to be the captains of industry and thus infinitely more important to the nation than the less academically blessed, who were destined to be subordinates.

Taylorist Influences on High Schools

The division of labor implied by scientific management quickly became a fundamental paradigm that structured the expectations educators had for the increasingly diverse student population at the turn of the century, especially for students in high school. As argued by economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Ginitis (Cole, 1988), the success of capitalism came to be viewed as dependent on a "minimal participation in decision-making by the majority of workers and protecting (the power, prerogatives, and privilege of) a single minority of managers" (p. 2). The role of the school as a social institution came to be viewed as teacher of this social order. This is not to say that most high school teachers, the majority of whom were first-generation college graduates, set out deliberately to train those in the middle to be drones. Still, that is exactly what they did, seduced by the belief that they were justifiably rewarding merit. The typical attitude among high school educators and the public was that the

"privileged status" some students got was simply a reward for their hard work; the conventional wisdom was that these students were the most meritorious because they worked the hardest. Thus, any special privileges or attention they may have received in return were deserved. This same rationale buttresses current discriminatory policies, such as weighted grading.

Challenging the Taylorist Rationale

The rationale of merit that justifies Taylorist practices in high schools has many flaws. One flaw is that most of the more academically successful students succeed, not because they work harder, but because they were born academically blessed. Powell et al. (1985), for example, found that in private high schools where performance pressure was evenly applied, the brightest students reported working the least. Parents of the most successful high school students often seem a bit bewildered about their children's performance because the youngsters do not seem to work very hard at their studies; typically, they do not—they are simply academically talented. The hardest-working students in any high school are probably the average students who, through hard work, overachieve and graduate with respectable academic credentials. Thus, policies that discriminate against the academically average teen are misguided.

A second flaw is the attitude that somehow the academically blessed are more important to the prosperity of the United States. Modern economic realities suggest that the opposite may be true. Lester Thurow (1992) of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), for example, suggests that the real problem is not the education of the academically blessed, but rather the education of the rest. In nation after nation, it has become clear that it is not possible to compete successfully in a global economy with only an educated elite. Workers at all levels must be equipped to change with change and to have the literacy and numeracy skills required of emerging occupations. Perhaps the key point in the "total quality management" philosophy of Deming is the equal importance of all workers and the need for collaboration; the Taylorist view of the manager as a source of all information and the savior of the common worker is old-fashioned. The new economic order requires all workers to be a part of the team, but it is difficult to figure how the workforce of the

future is to learn this value and these interpersonal skills when the first major organization they belong to—namely, their school—is run in the opposite fashion.

For those who seek to create *other ways to win* for those in the academic middle, ending Taylorism is not only an egalitarian issue but also an educational imperative, because it is closely linked to self-esteem, curriculum engagement, and the overall motivation of these students. When graduating high school seniors are asked to describe themselves, the academically blessed exhibit considerably higher self-concepts than those in the academic middle. More disturbing, the academically blessed not only have good things to say about themselves but often have pejorative things to say about the less blessed. In fact, there seems to be a dual problem: Students in the academic middle generally have a rather low opinion of themselves, whereas the academically blessed graduate with serious delusions of grandeur. It would seem that Taylorist assumptions do not serve either group very well.

Strategies for Ending Taylorism

It will be difficult to motivate those in the academic middle unless Taylorist attitudes and practices are eliminated in the schools, particularly high schools. Such efforts may also infuse some much-needed humility among the academically blessed. The following strategies are recommended.

Challenge the Culture: The Equity Audit

Taylorist attitudes have been around for five generations. They will not go away unless challenged in the same way people question attitudes about race, gender, and the environment. One does not change attitudes, however, by putting educators on the defensive. Change theory would suggest that a better approach is to let them discover they may unconsciously have been doing the wrong thing. One way to reach this discovery is through a faculty-led "equity audit." The intent of this internal audit is to simply document time, services, and preferential policies that have different effects on dif-

ferent groups of students. For example, divide the senior class into three academic groups by using the criteria suggested in Chapter 4. Then calculate such things as average class size and document the services provided by guidance, participation in special trips and seminars, and so on. The results will be obvious: 30% of the students will be getting 50% to 70% of the institutional resources and attention. The question then is this: Is it OK to be doing this? And if not, what should be done about it?

Challenge Discriminatory Policies and Practices

Just about every high school in the United States contains policies and practices that discriminate in favor of the academically blessed at the expense of those in the academic middle. Although the word *discriminate* may seem strong, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights does not regard it as too harsh. It has made segregation of students within schools a target of its enforcement efforts ("Amherst School," 1994). The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law has worked to make ability grouping a central issue in the Wilmington, Delaware, segregation case, and similar action led the San Jose, California, school district to drop its ability grouping system ("Amherst School," 1994). In Amherst, Massachusetts, in response to a challenge from parents of average youth, most of whom were minorities, a review panel recommended to the school board that the district drop the "use of weighted grades, class ranks, and courses labeled 'basic,' 'standard,' and 'advanced' " ("Amherst School," 1994, p. 1).

Is it too early to say that these cases are an early signal of changing attitudes toward policies and practices that favor the academically blessed? It may be, but it also is a sign that high schools functioning in this way are vulnerable in the courts. Although some of these practices, such as AP and honors courses, may be justified, giving extra weight to grades in these courses is not; John Dewey would call it "cruel and illiberal." Policies and practices such as these send the wrong messages to all children: To the blessed, it leads to illusions of grandeur; to the less blessed, the message is they are second rate. In these times of litigation, it may be only a matter to time before weighted grading goes the same way as single-gender

gym classes. In reality, the practice is somewhat comical because it leads to mathematical impossibilities: In high schools with weighted grading systems, it is not uncommon for a student to graduate with a GPA of greater than 4.0 (A); this fact explains why most competitive colleges first evaluate a student's high school records by recalculating or unweighting his or her GPA so that it can be realistically compared with those of others who apply. The point is that schools committed to creating *other ways to win* for those in the academic middle should debate these policies. These debates should include a representative group of parents and the public, not just the advocates of the academically blessed.

Stop the Obsessive Rank-Ordering of Students Against Each Other

Even at the worst of high schools, it can be predicted that the senior class will be ranked from top to bottom in terms of academic performance. High schools seem obsessed with rank-ordering students. The grading system of most teachers is designed first and foremost to rank-order the class. If you do not think so, imagine what would happen if a teacher gave all students an A; even if they all mastered the material, the teacher would be risking serious condemnation by peers and administrators as being too easy.

When one is challenging the obsession with rank-ordering students, it is effective to point out the implied philosophy behind this practice—namely, that for some to look good, the rest must look bad. The logical extension is that for some to look really good, a lot have to look bad. When teachers announce that they rank on a curve (and most do, whether they admit it or not), they need to understand what is implied—namely, that the objective of the evaluation is to rank-order the class, not to evaluate learning. To understand this issue better, let's consider the case of the President's Physical Fitness Award and the attitude of teachers toward this evaluation. Interestingly, although teachers and parents would consider it outrageous for everyone to receive an A in English, they would think it was great if everyone achieved sufficient physical fitness standards to receive the President's Award. What is the difference? First, the award is based on a set of very objective criteria, such as the ability to jump so far,

run so fast, and so forth. Second, because it is an objective standard, the competition is against the standard, not against other students, and therefore there is no need to rank-order students against one another. The goal is to make all learning fit this paradigm, whereby the goal is to achieve the standard, not to do better than other students in the class. This is a far cry from current practice. The point is that if for some to win big, the rest—namely, those in the academic middle—must lose, why should they try?

Seek a Way to Integrate Students of Differing Academic Ability

Most high schools begin the day with something called homeroom period. Homeroom is truly a unique phenomenon because it is probably the only circumstance, other than lining up alphabetically for graduation, in which the school does something that results in bringing high school students together on an egalitarian basis, independent of course selection, intellectual ability, athletic prowess, family income, or even race. More needs to be done to promote this intermingling among students of differing academic characteristics. Particularly detrimental is the segregation of students according to program of study; such division amounts to segregating students by ability. Although perhaps not by design, the realities of scheduling classes often result in the academically blessed ending up in the same classes. Likewise, those in the academic middle spend their high school careers interacting with others in the academic middle. Arguably, this practice does not serve either group well, but it is particularly harmful to those in the academic middle and perhaps explains why these students go unchallenged, unmotivated, and unengaged and why some teachers hate to teach them.

A commitment to those in the academic middle calls for doing things to end their isolation. Finding ways to ensure interaction among students of all academic abilities should become an obsession. One tactic is the institution of a portfolio requirement in which the portfolio team must include a mix of students from varying curricula to jointly plan and complete selected learning tasks or projects. Another is to resist ability grouping and to do whatever is possible to correct what occurs naturally because of the master

schedule. For example, one alternative is not to put all youth enrolled in calculus in the same social science class.

Create a "One Team" Culture

The final strategy is perhaps the most important. Although most high school mission statements suggest an interest in all students, they are, in fact, elitists; that is the culture. This condition needs to be changed. Kipling reminds us that the strength of the wolf lies in the pack; schools should embrace this philosophy as well. The desperate need is to convey this message to students on a daily basis: All are equally valued, no one is better than anyone else, arrogance is frowned upon, humility is valued, and harassment will not be tolerated. The goal is to go from having an *in group* to having *one group*. This conversion will not happen unless the principal, teachers, and guidance counselors are committed to creating such an environment.

SECTION II

Modifying Instructional Modalities and Practices

In the first section of this chapter, we argued that creating *other ways to win* for those in the academic middle begins with changing the treatment of these students. Only when these adolescents feel equal, not inferior, can educators expect them to exert equal efforts. The next step is to ensure that instructional modalities and practices used in college prep courses populated with academically average students match their learning styles.

Matching Instruction and Learning Styles

The following six strategies are offered as ways to improve the instructional effectiveness of the high school college prep program of study to make it more effective for the growing diversity of students who now enroll.

Emphasize Contextual or Applied Learning

The dominant instructional modality in most high school college prep classes is the "student/copying machine" model of instructional effectiveness. Teachers lecture, students copy down in their notebooks what the teacher says, and on tests students are asked to reproduce their notes. Although cognitive learning researchers suggest that this is the least effective instructional modality for all students, the academically blessed, perhaps because they are blessed, master the student/copying machine game early on in their high school careers and become quite good at it. When the content itself becomes more and more abstract or detached from the real world, their performance, in comparison with that of students in the academic middle, becomes even better because those in the academic middle learn best when the instructional modality and the material itself are "applied" (see Bottoms et al., 1992).

The dilemma for those in the academic middle who now enroll in college prep courses is that they are taught primarily in modalities not appropriate for their learning styles. For example, national studies of high school classroom instruction find that only 18% of teachers spend more than 10% of class time putting the course content into a real-world context (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). High schools committed to creating *other ways to win* for average youth need to address this instructional modality mismatch.

Contextual or applied learning strategies may be worth considering for all students. Research by the Southern Education Board revealed a fascinating inconsistency: Although vocational education students' scores on the NAEP test were lower than the scores of students in the college prep curriculum, the gap was significantly closer in problem solving than in math knowledge. Thus, vocational education students did much better on the problem-solving items than would have been predicted on the basis of their performance in math courses. This finding leads to speculation (Bottoms et al., 1992) that when math is taught in a real-world context, as occurs in vocational education, students learn to apply the knowledge and are better problem solvers, a worthy goal for all students, even those heading off to Ivy League colleges. John Dewey wrote that "education through vocation . . . combines within itself more of the factors conducive to learning than any other method" (1900, pp. 82-83).

In applied learning modalities, the content is grounded in the real world; the learner is active, not passive; and the emphasis is on problem solving, knowledge, and skills that are needed by problem solvers. Although the student/copying machine instructional modality is measured in terms of what students know, the contextual modality is more interested in what students can do. One such example is the City Watch program at Ridge Tech in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where the entire ninth-grade curriculum is taught within the context of an exploration of the students' community. Mathematics, for example, is taught by using the local community as the content to be numerated, measured, and otherwise described in mathematical terms.

Such dramatically different approaches are not necessary, however. What is necessary is a commitment by teachers to face the fact that their earlier instructional methods may not be effective for the growing number of academically average youth who now take college prep classes. Unfortunately, more than a few teachers take the "blame the learner" approach; that is, if students do not learn from a teacher's instructional method, the trouble must reside in them, and not in the teacher. After all, the better students seem to be doing just fine. This point of view may be one good reason for the fact that the fastest-growing groups of courses in higher education are remedial. Facing the challenge of academically preparing those in the middle to be successful in 2-year technical education requires a change to contextual learning modalities.

Emphasize Reading for Comprehension

When one looks closely at enrollments in remedial courses in higher education—those that are required but do not count toward a degree—we see that an interesting trend has developed. The percentage of students who must take math has actually gone down a bit, but the percentage of students who must take remedial reading has gone up. Remember that almost one fifth of semicompetitive students in the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study (Gray et al., 1993) reported being required to take remedial English; in other words, they were found to be deficient in reading for comprehension. The point is that if educators assume that the majority of those in the academic middle will continue on to higher education, preferably in 2-year technical programs, the goal is to ensure that they do not have

to take remedial courses. This point translates into an important reality: High schools need to face the fact that many students graduate with very poor reading skills.

Over the years, the college prep English classes have changed little. In some cases, the literature selections have been modernized, and more emphasis has been placed on writing. In times past, English teachers who taught college prep courses could be assured that their students were pretty good readers. Today, this assumption is false. Contemporary adolescents as a group do not spend as much time reading for pleasure as those of the past; they watch television instead. Those who seek to create *other ways to win*, which include ensuring the success of students who select these alternatives, must face the fact that the instructional objectives of high school English now must include improving student ability to read.

Emphasize Math and Science for All Seniors

For the average youth graduating from the academic middle and heading off to college, remedial English and remedial math seem to be almost virtual certainties these days. We have just addressed the reading issue; now, what can be done about math and science? This question is complicated by the finding in the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study that many academically average students who ended up in remedial math and science courses had taken above-average levels of math. In many cases, those who had to take remedial math courses had taken 3 years of college math. The trouble was that very few had taken a math course during their senior year. Thus, these students entered college not having taken any math for nearly a year and a half. No wonder they end up in remedial courses. The same pattern was found for science. Those students who most need to take math and science in their senior year, those in the academic middle who head off to higher education, are the least likely to be found in these courses in the 12th grade.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that every effort be made to encourage all students to take math during their senior year in high school. For those whose tentative career choice is a postsecondary program that will require science—for example, all paraprofessional health careers—taking science in the 12th grade is likewise important. One way to accomplish this goal is to adopt local graduation

policies that require 4 years of math and science to graduate, a practice that has been in place in the Connecticut Regional Vocational High School system for years.

Teach Keyboarding and Computer Software Skills

One cannot be successful in higher education without gaining the ability to use a standard keyboard effectively and to use standard software packages, especially word-processing, spreadsheet, and telecommunications software that now provide access to everything from the card catalogue of the campus library to the worldwide Internet. Likewise, computer skills are as important today to those who aspire to high skill/high wage work as physical strength was to the craftsperson of the past. In the modern workplace, computer skills have replaced manual dexterity and strength. Preparing students from the academic middle to be successful in pursuing prebaccalaureate education that leads to technical high-wage work therefore requires adequate preparation in both keyboarding and software manipulation.

Evidence from the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study (Gray et al., 1993) suggests that the majority of high school graduates, regardless of their academic credentials, may be graduating with inadequate computer skills. Even among those graduating with academically competitive credentials, only 48% indicated entering college with adequate computer skills. As might be expected, even fewer (38%) of those in the academic middle reported having adequate computer skills. Importantly, among this group, very few had taken a computer-intensive course in high school, and more than half had not taken a beginning typing course that would provide them with keyboarding fundamentals. Yet, remember that more than half of those graduating with academically noncompetitive credentials now enter college, where computer skills are a necessity; those who lack such skills are at an immediate disadvantage.

Experiment With Portfolios and Cooperative Learning

A *portfolio* is defined here as a collection of evidence or products that demonstrate a student's ability, as opposed to his or her knowl-

edge. This emphasis on application is important for all students but is particularly successful with academically average students. Although some states, most notably Vermont, have experimented with portfolios as a replacement for more traditional high school assessment techniques, such dramatic departures from present practice probably will not occur. Instead, it is recommended that a portfolio requirement be added to current graduation requirements. Doing so sends a message to all students, and even to teachers who need to get the message, that, in schools, both knowledge and ability are valued. This message has the potential to be a strong motivator of academically average youth.

Portfolios have another potential benefit: to increase the interaction of students and thus end isolation based on students' course selections. Portfolio policies can be developed to encourage collaborative or cooperative efforts that reach across program lines. The key words are *collaborative/cooperative efforts* and *peer learning*, new words for students' collaborative work in "groups."

Consider Block or Intensive Master Scheduling

A block or intensive master schedule typically replaces the standard 7-period high school day with a 4-period day plus lunch. Instead of being the typical 55 minutes, each period is now 90 minutes. The result is that courses normally taught over 180 days can be completed in one semester. Thus, a student interested in math could take eight math courses in high school. Unlike the typical high school schedule in which students take five or six courses each semester, in this plan students typically take only three major courses. This latter point is the reason for our recommendation of block scheduling.

Whereas the academically blessed can take five or six major courses each year, less able students often cannot handle so many different courses and different demands. They do much better when they are able to concentrate on three. This has been the experience at Hatboro Horsham High School in Pennsylvania, which uses block scheduling. Teachers reported that whereas the achievement of the best students remained high, the achievement of those in the academic middle increased significantly. Block or intensive scheduling has many other advantages as well, including significantly greater flexibility for creativity in the development of additional emphases

within the college prep program of study (as recommended in Chapter 9). The major advantage, however, is that average youth are allowed to concentrate their efforts on fewer subjects during a semester.

SECTION III

Motivating the Academic Middle

When asked to describe those in the academic middle, high school teachers typically have some difficulty—in itself, a testimony to the invisibility of these students. The most-cited characteristic is their lack of motivation. Probed further, teachers view these students as generally taking the easiest route in order to do as little as possible. Although some are very interested in certain aspects of the high school experience, in general, they are not very interested in their course work. The accuracy of this perception is not debated here. In fact, research conducted as part of the background for this book confirmed that, compared with their more academically blessed and successful peers, this group of students is largely not engaged in the curriculum; when it comes to academics, many may as well be taking correspondence courses. The issue, then, is not whether they are unmotivated, but how to motivate them.

Strategies for Motivating the Majority

There is little doubt that the majority of those in the academic middle can be motivated. In fact, most are motivated to do many things with great enthusiasm and energy; the problem is that the list does not include schoolwork. How does one motivate these youth, then? Some suggested strategies follow.

Develop Career Motives for Learning

Unlike the academically blessed, who perform even the most irrelevant academic schoolwork out of a sense of duty or foreknowledge of their future success, those in the academic middle are not so motivated. Academic work is often difficult for them, and they have

received little reward for their efforts; thus, they will not make an extra effort unless they believe it can make a difference. The most important connection to help them make is that it will make a difference when they graduate. Thus, we recommend that teachers of college prep courses populated by those in the academic middle make concrete efforts to relate classroom activity to probable future course work in higher education, which currently is the career goal of most in this group. This strategy has the potential for greater success if a good job has been done in developing the students' ICPs (see Chapter 8). Vocational educators have found, for example, that even the most recalcitrant and limited students can be motivated to learn basic academic skills when they see the need for them in the type of work they plan to pursue.

Have High Expectations for All Students

Throughout this book, the limited expectations of teachers for those in the academic middle have been both documented and discussed. In our view, these limited expectations ultimately limit motivation. Human nature is such that, lacking intrinsic motivation of the type developed in the first strategy above (develop career motives for learning), most will do only what is demanded. The motivational force of such demands should not be overlooked.

At present, little is asked of students from the academic middle even when they take college prep courses. In fact, it is not uncommon for students to drop vocational education courses because they demand more work than college prep courses taken by average students. The most direct result is that when these students graduate, they end up in remedial courses that are very expensive and that predict fairly accurately that a student will not graduate from college. A more productive strategy both for students and parents is to demand more from these students. Most students will respond to this external motivation. Not everyone will, of course. High expectations will mean that students who in the past got C's—given as gifts by teachers to keep the peace when they should have gotten D's or even F's—will now receive the grades they deserve. This experience will cause some degree of discontent among some parents, but not only is it the ethical thing to do, but also it is in the best interest of those whom it will make the most unhappy. Better a D or F in high school

that leads to plans other than pursuing a 4-year college degree than $40,000 in financial aid debt and no degree, which occurs in all too many cases now.

Improve Academic Self-Concepts by Catching Students Doing Things Right

This strategy is borrowed from the book *The One Minute Manager* (Blanchard & Johnson, 1982). Those in the academic middle need more old-fashioned attention and recognition from their teachers. A key to academic motivation is a positive self-concept about one's ability. Those in the academic middle typically have a low academic self-concept and are in the college prep program because they can see no other way to win. Little wonder that these students have negative academic concepts. During their first 8 years of school, teachers gave them negative feedback by catching them doing something wrong. Contrast this with the feedback received by the more academically blessed. They have had 8 years of teachers catching them doing things right.

A useful example of catching people doing things right is the one used by Blanchard in the film *The One Minute Manager*, in which he asks the viewer to remember how parents act when they are trying to teach children to walk. In short, they watch for even the smallest sign of success and then praise the children. Contrast this approach with another alternative—namely, punishing a child for attempts that are anything less than perfect steps. This sort of treatment would cause most of us to still be crawling around. Yet, the latter approach may all too often be that applied to academically average youth throughout high school. In particular, teachers should begin by positively reinforcing effort and then work on achievement by catching students making small improvements and praising these efforts.

Other Ways to Win

In this chapter, we began by arguing that if the goal is to ensure postsecondary success for all high school graduates, then high schools must (a) stop treating all but a few students as second-class citizens and (b) take a hard look at the instructional modalities and practices within the college prep curriculum now taken by most

students. Specific strategies were offered to achieve both. These steps, plus the implementation of a systematic career guidance plan that includes an ICP for each student and a redesign of the college prep curriculum to include additional emphases aimed at alternative postsecondary alternatives, were recommended as ways to create *other ways to win* for graduating high school students, particularly those from the academic middle. All of these efforts are necessary because, as discussed in Part II of this book, the number of students who pursue a 4-year college degree in the hope that it will lead to a job in the professional ranks but end up not realizing this goal and the costs to individuals and the nation from this mass failure is staggering. Yet, despite the costs, one is left with a nagging question: Will such changes ever take place, and will the plight of academically average youth in U.S. high schools ever become part of the mainstream of the American educational reform debate? This question is the topic of Chapter 11.

11

Bringing "Average" Students to Excellence

The term community *should be defined not only as a region to be served but also as a climate to be created.*

The Forgotten Half (1988, p. 53)

Creating alternatives for graduating high school seniors should be a constant educational concern. Currently, this is not the case. Events at a meeting of a local school's strategic planning committee observed by one of the authors exemplify this situation. The purpose of the meeting was to develop questions for a follow-up benchmarking survey of recent high school graduates, much like the Class of 1991 Follow-Up Study (Gray et al., 1993) referred to in this book. The leader of the group opened the meeting by asking a rather straightforward question: "What did members of the group want to know about their graduates that could be asked on a questionnaire?" Everyone took a posture of involved thought: Some looked at the ceiling thoughtfully; others rummaged through the handouts for the meeting. Clearly, no one wanted to speak up first. All were waiting for or deferring to those with power in the group to set the tone and direction of the meeting. They did not have to wait long. The superintendent of schools cleared his throat and gave the group his most wisdomly posture; clearly, he was ready to deliver a question of immense significance. Everyone

waited expectantly. "I wonder," said the superintendent, who then paused briefly to build the suspense, "what happens to our kids who take calculus in high school?"

From then on, the rest of the meeting was predictable. Attention focused solely on the academically blessed. One member asked a question that pertained to students who went to work after graduation. Although everyone noted that this question was a concern, it clearly was not too great a concern, as the topic was quickly dropped. No one ever raised a concern about those in the middle group. This group had no advocates at this meeting, nor do they most anywhere else.

This scenario is played out in various ways day after day in U.S. schools. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (OERI, 1994), only 6% of all graduates take calculus in high school. Only about 30% complete a rigorous academic program of high-level math, science, and language courses. Yet, this minority receives a disproportionate share of the resources, most of the attention, and virtually all of the recognition from high schools.

The purpose of this book is to bring to center stage the plight of those in the academic middle. Instead of asking about the academically blessed, we investigated the situations of the others. Research suggests that, for every one student who graduates with high academic credentials, two do not. Thus, it has been argued that the relevant question is not what happens to the one in three who heads to a prestigious college of his or her choice; data suggest that he or she is doing just fine. The relevant question is this: What happens to the other two in that ratio? In this case, data suggest that all is not well.

One of our particular concerns is those in the academic middle of U.S. high schools—those called by Powell et al. (1985) the "unspecial" because they are neither special needs students protected by legislation and taught in small classes by specially trained staff nor the academically gifted who are rewarded with the best teachers in equally small classes. Data suggest that, by and large, those in the academic middle of U.S. high schools are seriously adrift. They face a very uncertain future and get little help in preparing for it. The only message provided to them and their parents by the schools and seemingly everyone else is that there is only *one way to win:* trying to get a 4-year college degree in the hope that it will lead to a job in the professional ranks.

Challenging the *One Way to Win* Paradigm

Thus, the *first* message of this book is that the *one way to win* myth—the belief that future economic security can only be gained from a 4-year degree that will lead to a job in the professions—is, like all myths, mostly fiction with a dash of truth. Since the early 1980s, this widely held myth has been accepted almost without question by nearly everyone. Data from national surveys of graduating high school seniors demonstrate the wide acceptance of the myth. In such surveys, 94.7% indicate planning to continue their education, 83.9% at the 4-year baccalaureate level (see Table 1.1). When asked to name the occupation they expect to be in at age 30, 49.3% of males and 68.8% of females cite "professional" (see Table 1.4). Virtually all high school youth have the same career plan, the path recommended by the *one way to win* myth.

The *one way to win* message pressed on youth regardless of academic ability or interests comes from all sectors of society, but most importantly from parents and teachers. According to an NCES study conducted in 1992, 82.9% of high school sophomores reported that their mothers were recommending college, compared with 64.8% just 10 years before (see Table 2.1). Although parents may not be objective when it comes to their children's future, one might expect high school teachers and guidance counselors to be more so, particularly in advising academically marginal students to pursue interests other than a baccalaureate degree program. But data suggest the opposite. Between 1982 and 1992, the percentage of high school sophomores who said their teachers and counselors were recommending college doubled from 32.3% to more than 65% (see Table 2.1).

No doubt, both parents and high school faculty have students' best interests in mind. Their advice is based on a belief that today there is only *one way to win*. Unfortunately, they are misled and are giving well-intended but nonetheless poor advice to those in the academic middle. Although their intent is to ensure that adolescents will be winners in life, the advice they give often ensures the opposite effect on those in the academic middle. Instead, it ensures that they become a part of the college dropout or underemployment statistics.

The first dilemma or hint that the *one way to win* advice may not be suitable for all is that, among those who actually pursue a 4-year

college degree, at best only half ever graduate. A close look at the academic credentials of high school graduates reveals the reason. The implicit assumption of those who indiscriminately provide *one way to win* advice to today's youth—namely, that everyone is academically qualified to do college-level academic work—is not true. Viewed from a national perspective, only about 30% of those graduating from U.S. high schools have the credentials that predict readiness to do legitimate college-level work (see Figure 4.1). Thus, when a national average of 60% to 70% go directly on to higher education, it is clear that many who are admitted simply are unprepared.

Most of those who begin a 4-year college program academically unprepared spend their freshman year in college taking remedial courses. Although most colleges do not willingly publicize the percentage of incoming freshmen taking remedial courses, available data suggest that it is not uncommon today to find 50% of freshmen at some 4-year degree-granting institutions having to take one or more remedial courses. Although colleges do their best to put a positive spin on these courses, the fact is that they are the first predictor that the majority who take them will not graduate. Most ultimately cool out or fade away. The result is predictable: Nationally, of those who start a 4-year college degree, at best only half have graduated not 4, not 5, but 6 years later. Among those who start a 4-year college degree, which are most likely to drop out—the academically blessed or the academic middle? Although arguably too many of the academically blessed drop out, particularly in their freshman year, the likelihood is that most graduate in 4 years. Those from the middle, however, are the most likely never to graduate and probably should have considered other postsecondary alternatives, such as a 1- or 2-year technical program or a school-to-career option.

The second dilemma with the *one way to win* advice is the scarcity of college-level jobs for those who graduate. In the 1960s, only one in five 4-year college graduates failed to find college-level work. In the 1990s, it is one in three; in the professions, such as accounting or teaching, it is one in two. Furthermore, the outlook appears to predict that it will get worse, not better. When companies downsize, frequently college-level middle-management jobs go first because excess hourly jobs were cut long ago. Again, the important point to ponder is this: Who is at the greatest risk of not finding college-level

work even after graduating? Is it the academically blessed who graduate from the most prestigious colleges with the best-connected alumni, or those from the academic middle who squeak through in 5 or 6 years and graduate from second-tier colleges? Dupont, for example, in the 1980s, recruited at more than 40 campuses; now it recruits at only six prestigious and competitive colleges and universities. The likelihood that those from the academic middle will ever graduate from any of these institutions is next to none. Thus, those in the academic middle are the most at risk of being frustrated in attaining professional jobs in major corporations, even if they graduate from college. Such findings lead to the conclusion that the *one way to win* paradigm, though good advice for the academically blessed, is largely a myth for those from the academic middle. For those in this group who follow such advice, losers—those who drop out or end up underemployed and frustrated—will outnumber winners.

The third dilemma with the *one way to win* myth is its cost. The cost, both in unmet expectations and in monetary terms, is huge. The number of underemployed college graduates who hold jobs they could have gotten after high school or who are returning to a 2-year technical postsecondary technical program to get a decent job increases each year. Unfortunately, many of these young adults who cannot find college-level work have student loan debts to pay off. Between 1990 and 1995, the number of student loans from the federal government was projected to have increased by 50% (Hartle, 1994). By 1995, federal student loans were expected to exceed $24 billion. The dilemma is this: Fewer families or governments can afford this cost of education. The growth in the student loan debt is evidence of families' growing inability to pay. This situation, accompanied by a national debt of approximately $4 trillion, leads us to wonder how much longer the United States will be able to provide such loans to so many persons without stricter criteria about recipients' abilities to do college-level work. Finally, there is the unmeasured human cost to youth who early in life sense that the only valued thing to do after high school graduation—namely, pursue a 4-year college degree—is clearly beyond their ability or what they can imagine as possible and thus give up. The need is for alternatives, for *other ways to win*, that can be effectively communicated to them and valued as ways to develop all the United States human resources.

There Are *Other Ways to Win*

The *second* message of this book is that there are alternatives, *other ways to win*, other routes to financial security and rewarding careers that should be particularly relevant to those in the academic middle, those most at risk of losing if they pursue the *one way to win* myth. This argument is developed in detail in Chapter 7. Suffice it to say here that if the goal is an economically and personally rewarding career, the goal should not be education per se, but rather gaining the prerequisite skills necessary to compete for high skill/high wage work. The advice that such work can only be gotten with a baccalaureate degree is not true. Many high skill/high wage work occupations in technical fields do not require a baccalaureate degree. Just as high skill/high wage professional work requires prerequisite skills, so too do these occupations require specific occupational skills. Unlike professional work, however, for which prerequisite skills are certified by baccalaureate or graduate school degrees, the skills required to obtain technician-level employment can be learned in either 1- and 2-year postsecondary technical programs or in school-to-career programs that include formal work-based preparation.

How well do these jobs pay? According to U.S. Department of Labor data, they pay very well. For example, individuals who successfully pursue high skill/high wage occupations, particularly in the occupational group identified as craft, precision metal, and specialized repair, as well as certain technical occupations in health and engineering, will earn more than all college graduates except for those baccalaureate degree holders who successfully pursue careers in the managerial or professional ranks (see Table 7.3). Meanwhile, unlike the more glamorous managerial and professional occupations, the demand for skilled workers in these fields greatly exceeds the supply (see Table 5.2). Thus, there is *another way to win*—namely, obtaining the prerequisite skills for competing for high skill/high wage work that does not require a BA degree. The challenge is to reform the schools to motivate those in the academic middle to pursue these alternative ways to win. Redesign the high school curriculum to increase their propensity for success, and do it so well that parents will want their children to be involved. But will such efforts work?

Will Efforts to Create Alternatives Succeed?

Although veteran high school educators, especially those who teach college prep courses to academically average students, will readily admit a need for alternatives, their encounters with other publics—parents, school boards members, elected officials, and so forth—may well leave them skeptical about the viability of efforts to change the situation. As one counselor interviewed for this book put it, "Whenever I mention 2-year education to parents, I see their eyes glaze over. They have their minds set on a 4-year college." This counselor expresses a reality that cannot be denied.

The present mind-set in favor of 4-year college education will negate efforts to create alternatives for those in the academic middle of U.S. high schools. Yet, at the same time, it has been documented that providing only the 4-year alternative ensures that more than half who try it will fail and that the cost of this failure is terribly high. Thus, although the obstacles may be formidable, the need to create *other ways to win* is great. A design for creating these alternatives is presented in Chapters 8, 9, and 10. The recommendations are designed to meet the need to create an openness to alternatives, as well as an academic program to ensure that those who choose these alternatives are successful. The four messages contained in this design are reviewed below.

Reaching Out to Parents

The *third* message of this book is that parents are arguably the most critical variable in determining success of efforts to create alternatives for those in the academic middle. Survey research of high school sophomores found that 82.9% of all high school sophomores mention at least their mother as the individual recommending college (see Table 2.1). The unavoidable conclusion is that involving parents of academically average youth in secondary course selection and postsecondary planning is critical. These parents must be provided objective data about probabilities of their child's success in different postsecondary alternatives and the financial costs involved. In Chapter 8, a number of strategies are suggested for involving

parents. Parents must be involved in the ICP process, especially the points at the end of the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades when a student's plans can be matched with his or her academic record.

At first, the majority of parents can be expected to resist anything but a 4-year college degree for their children. Aside from genuine concern about the economic future of their children, many parents are sometimes under intense social pressure to have their children attend a 4-year college. Yet, conditions are changing. Very few individuals can afford to send their children to college without borrowing money or taking out a second mortgage. Meanwhile, they are well aware from personal or friends' experience that many who graduate from college do not find the expected high-paying job waiting for them. The net result is that more parents are willing to consider alternatives, particularly if their child is not a great student.

Providing an ICP for All Students

The *fourth* message focuses on the fact that the successful creation of *other ways to win* for those from the academic middle requires a systematic program of career guidance that centers around an ICP for all students. This plan requires the involvement of both students and parents in its formulation and in structured "thoughtful confrontation" of career aspirations and academic achievement. Although the evidence for the need to create *other ways to win* for high school students from the academic middle is overwhelming, this in no way ensures the success of efforts. It is quite possible that much effort will be invested in redesigning the college prep program of study to include new emphases for those in the academic middle, only to have no one elect to take them. A career guidance structure is needed to set up a process in which these course-taking decisions are more thoughtful and more realistic. Such a career guidance structure should begin in the junior high, at the latest, so that realistic course-taking decisions can be made, beginning in the ninth grade.

Although career guidance is important for all students, it is important to understand the role it plays in ensuring the success of efforts to create *other ways to win*. The target group of students in our discussion, those from the academic middle, are the most likely to exhibit all signs of career immaturity. They do not know what to do,

so they take what they see as the only alternative and passively prepare to go to 4-year colleges. They will continue to select this option unless an effort is made to develop a process in which they are forced to confront the realities of their plans and are provided with alternatives. They may still choose to pursue the *one way to win* myth. In fact, at first the majority will; but over time, their involvement in a systematic career guidance program structured to provide them with data about the reality of their plans will lead more and more to choose the two new options recommended to be included within a broad college preparatory curriculum.

Redesigning the College Prep Program

The *fifth* message of this book is that creating *other ways to win* calls for doing things differently in U.S. high schools, particularly in the so-called college prep curriculum now elected by more and more academically average youth. Faced with the political reality that they cannot bar these youth from taking college prep courses and that failing most of them is also not an option, high school educators have two choices. First, they can pretend that these teens are, in fact, preparing for college and let them slide through unchallenged and unprepared. Second, they can reform the college prep program of study to make it more instructionally effective for average students. Ethically, there is no choice. Doing nothing means continuing the downward spiral of these youth, leading to their enrollment in remedial courses at 4-year colleges and later dropping out after having collected significant levels of student loan debt. It is time to redesign the college prep program of study.

Specific recommendations to reform college prep are offered in Chapters 9 and 10. The redesign proposal centers around adding different emphases within the college prep program of study and moving away from the "shopping mall" approach to a significantly more structured, sequential, and articulated curriculum.

In Chapter 9, we argue that virtually every high school in the United States has already bifurcated its college prep curriculum into two emphases—the highly structured and demanding honors/advanced placement emphasis and a mostly unstructured, undemanding, unarticulated potpourri of college prep courses. We recommended two additional emphases. One prepares students to make

the transition to, and to be successful in, 1- or 2-year postsecondary technical education programs that lead to high skill/high wage work. We call this the prebaccalaureate technical postsecondary emphasis. The second is a school-to-career option patterned after the SWOA, passed by Congress in 1994. We call this emphasis the school-to-career option. The goal of this emphasis is to prepare students to make the transition to, and to be successful in, one of a variety of employer-sponsored employer/worker group training programs in high skill/high wage occupations that now require academic skills commensurate with those taught in the college prep academic program.

It is important to assert here that these recommendations to add different emphases within the college preparatory curriculum are not intended to make the education of the academically average student less rigorous or inferior. The intent is to make it different in the junior and senior years in order to prepare students to successfully pursue postsecondary alternatives to a 4-year baccalaureate program in which their chances of success are problematic.

The redesign proposal calls for a departure from the "take what you want" philosophy of student course selection that has predominated since the 1970s. We advocate the structuring of these emphases, meaning that students will follow a well-planned sequence of articulated courses—and the completion of one of the emphases by each student expecting the high school to recommend him or her to higher education institutions. The message to students and parents is this: Complete one of the four emphases if you expect the school to recommend you for any form of higher education.

This message may sound like a very strong assertion, especially to those who started their educational careers in the 1970s, during the advent of the "shopping mall" high school. Many may think that parents would not support a directive approach. National survey data suggest the opposite. The authors of a study conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation (Walsch, 1994) concluded that educators may be out of sync with parents on a variety of issues, including the degree of structure in the curriculum. Those in the sample were asked whether they believed that setting up clear guidelines on what students should learn and what teachers should teach in every major subject so that students and teacher know what is expected would improve academic achievement. Both the general public and parents overwhelming agreed, including 92% of parents of African American

students. The public wants structure! We believe that parents of high school students would welcome clearly defined programs of academic courses that lead directly to alternative types of postsecondary education or other options.

In Chapter 10, we suggested strategies designed to make instruction within these four emphases more effective for academically average youth. Many of these strategies, such as emphasizing reading for understanding and mastery of computer software skills (e.g., word processing), are applicable to all. Other proposals, such as ensuring that all students take math and science in their senior year, are clearly aimed at those in the academic middle, who are the least likely to be found in these classes during their last year in high school. Their absence often results in the need to enroll in remedial courses in college.

One significant obstacle to effective educational redesign for those in the academic middle is the fact that they have been largely written off by some veteran high school teachers as unmotivated and lazy. Thus, in Chapter 10 we present strategies to motivate those from the academic middle. Although a number of approaches to motivating these students exist, they all begin with changing the treatment of these students in high school. Currently, those in the academic middle are largely relegated to second- or spectator-class status. Thus, why should anyone be surprised by their lack of motivation? Efforts to create *other ways to win* will work only if this aspect of the high school culture can be changed.

Challenging the High School Culture

The *sixth* message of this book is that the creation of alternatives for average youth will not occur without a groundswell of concern about this group from teachers, administrators, and school boards and without a willingness to try to change Taylorist attitudes. Creating *other ways to win* in U.S. high schools will require much work and the courage to stimulate much more thoughtful confrontation by parents and students regarding the reality of postsecondary plans. None of this will happen or will be effective without a change in attitude among high school educators about the relative importance of average youth. The policies and cultures of most high schools favor the intellectually blessed. Taylorism is alive and well in U.S.

high schools; as long as it prevails, average youth will remain invisible and unmotivated.

Clearly, in the distribution of school resources, those in the middle do not receive their fair share. As reported earlier, even the courts are taking note of discriminatory practices such as weighted grading systems, disproportionate class sizes, and disproportionate allocation of resources and guidance services. These inequities have been tolerated for years because of the Taylorist attitude that the academically blessed are more important to society and therefore deserve special treatment. This is an old, unfair idea that needs to be challenged. It represents a form of intellectual bigotry that should not be tolerated.

Another aspect of challenging the culture is taking an honest look at the college prep program of study and recognizing its deficiencies. It needs to be redesigned. We see promising signs that high school educators sense this need. The rather quick spread of tech prep efforts across the United States can be interpreted as evidence that high school administrators, counselors, and teachers are well aware that the academic complexion of those who now take college prep curriculum has changed and that something needs to be done.

One final element of the high school culture that needs to be challenged is the widespread belief in the *one way to win* myth by a majority of teachers and counselors. Data reported earlier indicate that the number of high school students who say their teachers and counselors advised them to go to college has doubled in the last 10 years (see Table 2.1). Considering the absence of evidence that the numbers of students who are academically prepared to do college work have doubled, we must assume that most teachers and counselors have bought the *one way to win* myth. They also have been convinced that getting a 4-year degree is the only hope for attaining success in society and therefore appear to be advising all but a very few students to give it a try.

We hope this book provides the reader with an understanding of the myth of *one way to win*. Educators who advise students on postsecondary plans have an obligation to know what they are talking about. According to the facts, there are *other ways to win* in which the propensity for success both in postsecondary education and future economic security is a lot higher for those in the academic middle. Those who seek to create *other ways to win* must challenge the prejudice that school staff have in favor of the 4-year baccalaureate

degree. Educators must understand that, for the majority of youth in their schools, pursuit of a 4-year degree is a very risky proposition.

Doing What's Right

This book was written to draw attention to students in the academic middle of U.S. high schools. We sought to expose the false complacency that emanates from the belief that because most youth now enroll in the college prep program of study and go to 4-year colleges in record numbers, all is well. To the contrary, data reveal that, for the majority, all is not well: Of those who go to college unprepared, most fail, literally, or fail to meet their aspirations to obtain professional jobs, and they often suffer great financial and personal costs in the process. But even if no costs were involved, educators have a professional obligation to treat all students equally. Clearly, those in the academic middle are not receiving their fair share of high school educational resources. Those from the academic middle have a right to equal attention, resources, and—when deserved—recognition. Their successes and failures are just as important to the larger society, to the community, and to their families as those of the academically blessed, and they should be just as important to their high school as well.

This chapter began with an account of a school district planning meeting. The dialogue at this meeting began with questions, not about the majority, but about how the few who took calculus were doing in college. This little scenario illustrates the preoccupation of public schools with the academically blessed and is played out in differing ways day after day, week after week, in U.S. high schools. It would have been significant if someone had said, "I think our real concern should be the students who did not take calculus." These students should take the center stage in the educational debate. These students need advocates. Maybe you will be one. Maybe the next time attention turns to the academically blessed, you will voice some interest and/or concern about the rest. After all, it is the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do for the adolescents involved and for attaining the appropriate balance of human resource development for the 21st century.

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Other Ways to Win

Creating Alternatives for High School Graduates

Kenneth C. Gray and Edwin L. Herr
Penn State University

High school students in the "academic middle" are at a great disadvantage when graduation time comes. In terms of traditional career paths, their futures aren't bright. Today's labor market is uncertain and difficult. Tuition costs for traditional 4-year colleges have soared out of reach for many students. And the academic records of these students will greatly limit their likelihood of acceptance and, therefore, their options for further education.

But there *are* promising alternatives. And that's the good-news message from authors Gray and Herr.

This timely book explores the choices available to students beyond traditional 4-year colleges, options that carry a much higher probability of success and are more accessible for students in the academic middle. The authors discuss the long-held "one way to win" theory and analyze why it is no longer working.

Using information gained by studying the experiences of secondary and postsecondary students, Gray and Herr document the clear and immediate need to help students regain control of their futures. They explain the importance of learning relevant occupational skills and explore alternative avenues for training, such as 1- and 2-year postsecondary technical institutions and work-based programs sponsored by employers and employee groups.

Other Ways to Win presents three major steps that schools or districts can take to modify school programs in order to create viable options for students. It shows specific strategies designed to involve teachers, parents, and students in the process of better preparing students for graduation and for the workplace.

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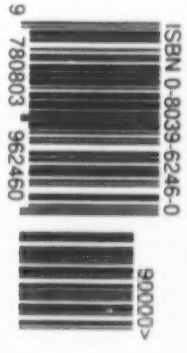

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